

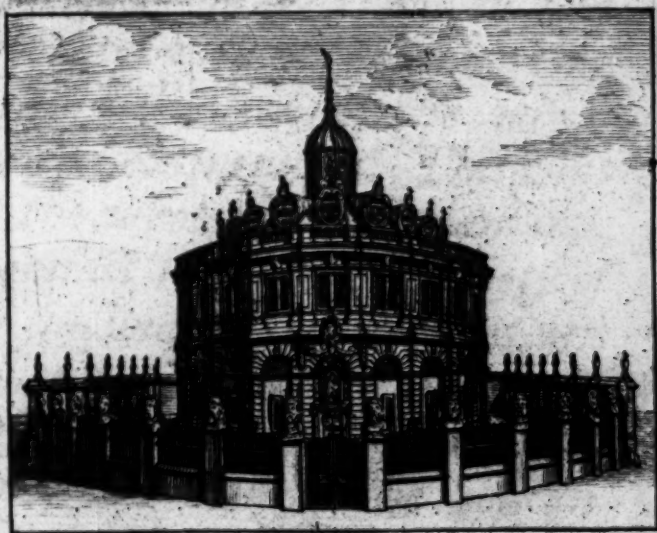




M. Gorges
THE ART
OF
CONTENTMENT,

By the AUTHOR
OF
THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN, &c.

*It is but lost labour, that ye haste to rise up early, and
so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness :
for so he giveth his beloved sleep. Psal. 127. 3.*



At the THEATER in OXFORD, MDCCV.

Imprimatur,

RAD. BATHURST

Vice-Cancell. Oxon.

Feb. 24. 1675.





THE PREFACE.

THE desire of happiness is so coessential with our nature, so interwoven and incorporate with it, that nothing but the dissolution of the whole frame can extinguish it. This runs thro' the whole race of mankind, and amidst the infinite variety of other inclinations, preserves it's self entire. The most various contradictory tempers do yet conspire in this, and men of the most un-

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equal fortunes, are yet equal in their wishes of being happy.

But this concurrence as to the end is not more universal than the disagreement about the way. Every man would have happiness, but wherein that consists, or how it is to be attain'd has been very diversly opin'd. Indeed the ultimate supreme happiness as it is originally inherent in God, so it is wrapt up in those clouds and darkness, which, as the Psalmist says, are round about him, Psal. 18. 11.

And we can see nothing of it, but in those gleams and raies he is pleas'd to dart out upon us; so that all our estimates as to our final felicity, must be measur'd by those revelations he has made of it.

But one would think, our temporal happiness were as much a mystery as our eternal, to see what variety

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variety of blind pursuits are made after it. One man thinks 'tis seated on the top pinnacle of honour, and climbs till perhaps he falls head-long. Another thinks it a mineral, that must be digg'd out of the earth, and toils to lade himself with thick clay, Hab. 2. 6. and at last finds a grave, where he sought his treasure. A third supposes it consists in the variety of pleasures, and wearies himself in that pursuit, which only cloy and disappoints. Yet every one of these can read you lectures of the gross mistake and folly of the other, whilst himself is equally deluded.

*Thus do men chase an imaginary good, till they meet with real evils; herein exposing themselves to the same cheat Laban put upon Jacob, they serve for Rachel, and are rewarded with Leah; court
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fancied beauty, and marry loath'd deformity. Such delusive felicities as these are the largesses of the Prince of the Air, who once attempted to have inveigled even Christ himself, Mat. 4.

But God's proposals are more sincere; he knows how sandy, how false a foundation all these external things must make, and therefore warns us not to build so much as our present satisfaction upon them, but shews us a more certain, a more compendious way to acquire what we gasp after, by telling us, that as Godliness in respect of the next, so Contentment for this world is great gain, 1 Tim. 6. 6. It is indeed the unum necessarium, the one point in which all the lines of worldly happiness are concentred, and to compleat it's excellence, 'tis to be had at home:

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home: nay, indeed only there. We need not ramble in wild pursuits after it, we may form it within our own breasts: no man wants materials for it, that knows but how to put them together.

And the directing to that skill is the only design of the ensuing Tract; which coming upon so kind an errand, may at least hope for an unprejudic'd reception. Contentment is a thing we all profess to aspire to, and therefore it cannot be thought an unfriendly office to endeavour to conduct men to it. How far the ensuing considerations may attain to that end, I must leave to the judgment and experience of the Reader, only desiring him, that he will weigh them with that seriousness which befits a thing wherein both his happiness and duty are concern'd:

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for in this (as in many other instances) God has so twisted them together, that we cannot be innocently miserable. The present infelicities of our murmurs and impatiencies have an appendant guilt, which will consign us to a more irreversibile state of dissatisfaction hereafter.

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THE ART OF CONTENTMENT.

SECT. I.

Of the necessary Connexion between Happiness and Contentment.

I. **G**OD who is essentially happy in himself, can receive no accession to his felicity by the poor contributions of men. He cannot therefore be suppos'd to have made them upon intuition of encreasing, but communicating his happiness. And this his original design

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is very visible in all the parts of his Economy towards them. When laps'd man had counterplotted against himself, defeated the purpose of the Divine goodness, and plunged his whole nature into the opposite state of endless misery; he yet reforc'd his first design, and by an expedient as full of wonder as mercy, the death of his Son, recovers him to his former capacity of bliss. And that it might not only be a bare capacity, he has added all other methods proper to work upon a rational creature. He has shew'd him his danger, set before him in perspective that eternal Tophet, which he is advis'd to shun. On the other side he has no less lively describ'd the heavenly *Jerusalem*, the celestial Country to which he is to aspire: nay farther, has levell'd his road to it, leads him not as he did the Israelites thro' the wilderness, thro' intricate mazes to puzzle his understanding; thro' *a land of drought wherein were fiery Serpents and Scorpions*, Deut. 8. 15. to discourage and affright him; but has in the Gospel chalkt out a plain, a safe, nay a pleasant path; as much superior both in the ease of the way, and in the end to which it leads, as heaven is to *Canaan*.

2. BY doing this he has not only secured our grand and ultimate happiness, but provided for our intermedial also. Those Christian duties which are to carry us to heaven, are our refreshment, our *viaticum* in our journey; his yoke is not to gall and fret us, but an engine by which we may with ease (and almost insensibly) draw all the clogs and incumbrances of humane life. For whether we take Christianity in its whole complex, or in its several and distinct branches, 'tis certainly the most excellent, the most compendious art of happy living: its very tasks are rewards, and its precepts are nothing but a divine sort of Alchymy, to sublime at once our nature and our pleasures.

3. THIS may be evidenc'd in every particular of the Evangelical Law: but having formerly made some attempt towards it in another *tract, I shall not here reassume the whole subject. I shall only single out one particular precept, wherein happiness is not (as the others) only implied, and must be catcht at the rebound by consequence and event; but is literally express'd, and is the very matter of the duty: I

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mean the precept of acquiescence and *Contentment*; Happiness and this true genuine Contentment, being terms so convertible, that to bid us be content, is but another phrase for bidding us be happy.

4. TEMPORAL enjoyments, such as are pleasure, wealth, honour, and the rest, tho' they make specious pretences to be the measure of human happiness, are all of them justly discarded by the Philosopher in his *Ethicks*, upon this one consideration, that coming from abroad they may be withheld or taken from us: and our tenure being precarious, we even for that reason are unhappy in our most desirable possessions, because we still are lyable to be so. And therefore he concludes, that felicity must be placed in the mind and soul, which stands without the reach of fortune; and in the practice of vertue, which in its own nature, and not in its contingent use is truly good, and therefore certainly renders the possessors such.

5. BUT this practice being diffused thro' the whole extent of Moral duty, *Epictetus* thought he had deserved well of humane nature, when he drew it up in two short words, to *sustain* and *abstain*: that is to bear with constancy adyerse events,
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and with moderation enjoy those that are prosperous. Which complexure of Philosophy is yet more fully, as well as more compendiously express'd in the single notion of *Contentment*: which involves the patient bearing of all misadventures, and generous contempt of sensual illectives. This state of mind the Greeks express by calling it *αὐτάρκεια*, or self-sufficiency, which, we know, properly speaking, is one of the incommunicable attributes of the divine nature, and the Stoicks expressly pretend, that by it moral men are enabled to rival their Gods; in *Seneca's* phrase, to make a controversie with *Jupiter* himself. But abating the insolent blasphemy of an independent felicity, Christianity acknowledges a material truth in the assertion: and *St. Paul* declares of himself, that having learnt how to want and how to abound, and in whatever state he happens to be in, therewith to be content: he is able to do all things thro' *Christ* that strengthens him, *Phil.* 4. 11, 12, 13. and having nothing, to possess all things, *2 Cor.* 6. 10. in quo

6. WHICH great event comes about, not only because all good things are eminently in the divine nature, and he who by *Vertue* and *Religion* possesses him, thereby

thereby in a full equivalence has every thing; but also upon humane measures, and principles of Philosophy: the compendious address to wealth, as *Plato* rightly observ'd, being not to encrease possessions, but lessen desires. And if so, 'twill follow that the contented man must be abundantly provided for, being so entirely satisfied with what he has, as to have no desires at all. Indeed 'tis truly said of covetous men, and is equally verified of all who have any desire to gratify, that they want no less what they have, than what they have not: but the reverse of that Paradox is really made good by *Contentment*, which bestows on men the enjoyment of whatever they have, and also whatever they have not; and by teaching to want nothing, abundantly secures not to want happiness.

7. ON the other side, this one grace being absent, it is not in the power of any success or affluence to make life a tolerable thing. Let all the materials of earthly happiness be amass'd together and flung upon one man, they will without contentment, be but like the fatal prize of *Tarpeia's* treason, who was prest to death with the weight of her booty. He that has the elements of felicity, and yet cannot

not form them into a satisfaction, is more desperately miserable than he that wants them: for he who wants them has yet something to hope for, and thinks if he had them he might be happy; but he who insignificantly possesses them, has no reserve, has not so much as the flattery of an expectation; for he has nothing left to desire, and yet can be as little said to enjoy.

8. HE therefore that would have the extract, the quintessence of happiness, must seek it in Content. All outward accessions are but the dross and earthy part: this alone is the spirit, which when tis once separated, depends not upon the fate of the other; but preserves it's vigor when that is destroy'd. *St. Paul*, whom I before mention'd, is a ready instance of it, who professes to be *content in what ever state*; Contentment being nor so inseparately link'd to external things, but that they may subsist apart. That those are often without it we are too sure, and that it may be without them, is as certainly true; tho' by our own default we have not so many examples of it. An heart that rightly computes the difference between Temporals and Eternals, may resolve with the Prophet, *Al-*
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tho' the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herds in the stall; yet I will rejoyce in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my Salvation, Hab. 3. 17, 18. He that has God need not much deplore the want of any thing else: nor can he that considers the plenty and glory of his future state, be much dejected with the want or abjectness of his present.

9. YET so indulgent is God to our infirmities, that knowing how unapt our impatient natures are to *walk only by faith, and not at all by sight,* 2 Cor. 5. 7. he is pleas'd to give us fair ante-pasts of satisfaction here, dispenses his Temporal blessings tho' not equally, yet so universally, that he that has least, has enough to oblige, not only his acquiescence, but his thankfulness. Tho' every man has not all he wishes, yet he has that which is more valuable than that he complains to want; nay, which he himself could worse spare, were it put to his option.

10. AND now from such a disposure of things, who would not expect that mankind should be the chearfullest part of the creation?

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creation? that the sun should not more rejoyce to run his course, Psalm 19. 5. than man should to finish his: that a journey which has so blessed an end, and such good accommodation by the way, should be past with all imaginable alacrity, and that we should live here practisers and learners of the state of unmix'd interminable joys, to which we aspire. But alas! if we look upon the universality of men, we shall find it nothing so; but while all other Creatures gladfomly follow the order of their Creation, take pleasure in those things God has assign'd for them, we with a sullen perverseness quarrel at what we should enjoy, and in every thing make it our business, not to fit it for our use, but to find out some concealed quality which may render it unfit. We look insidiously upon our blessings, like men only that design'd to pick a quarrel, and start a pretence for mutinying. From hence it is that man, who was design'd the Lord of the world, to whose satisfaction all inferiour beings were to contribute, is now the unhappiest of the Creatures: nay, as if the whole order of the universe were inverted, he becomes slave to his own vassals, courts all these

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little sublunary things with such passion, that if they prove coy and fly his embraces, he is mad and desperate; if they fling themselves into his arms, he is then glutted and satiated; like Amnon, *he hates more than he loved*, 2 Sam. 13. 15. and is sicker of his possession, than he was of his desire.

10. AND thus will it ever be till we can keep our desires more at home, and not suffer them to ramble after things without reach. That honest *Roman*, who from his extraordinary industry upon his little spot of ground received such an increase, as brought him under suspicion of witchcraft, is a good example for us. God has placed none of us in so barren a soil, in so forlorn a state, but there is something in it which may afford us comfort; let us husband that to the utmost, and 'tis scarce imaginable what improvement, even he that appears the most miserable, may make of his condition. But if in a fullen humour we will not cultivate our own field, because we have perhaps more mind to our neighbours, we may thank our selves if we starve. The despising of what God has already given us, is sure but cold invitation to farther bounty. Men are indeed forced sometimes
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to reward the mutinous: but God is not to be so attacked, nor is it that sort of violence which can ever force heaven. The Heathen could say that *Jupiter* sent his plagues among the poorer sort of men, because they were always repining: and indeed there is so much of truth in the observation, that our impatience and discontent at our present condition, is the greatest provocation to God to make it worse.

11. IT must therefore be resolv'd to be very contrary to our interest, and surely 'tis no less to our duty. It is so, if we do but own our selves men, for in that is imply'd a subordination and submission to that power which made us so; and to dispute his managery of the world, to make other distributions of it than he has done, is to renounce our subjection, and set up for dominion. But this is yet more intolerable as we are Christians, it being a special part of the Evangelical discipline, cheerfully to conform to any condition: to *know how to be abased, and how to abound, to be full, and to be hungry*, Phil. 4. 12. *to be careful for nothing*, ver. 6. Nay, so little do's Christ give countenance to our peevish discontents, our wanton out-cries when

we are not hurt, that he requires more than a contentment, an exultancy and transport of joy under the heaviest pressures, under reproaches and persecutions. *Rejoyce ye in that day, and leap for joy*, Luke 6. 23. And sure nothing can be more contrary to this, than to be always whining and complaining, crying in the Prophets phrase, *my leanness, my leanness, wo is me*, Isa. 24. 16. When perhaps Moses's simile do's better fit our state, *Jesurun waxed fat and kicked*, Deut. 32. 15.

12. AND as this querulous humour is against our interest and duty, so is it visibly against our ease. 'Tis a sickness of the mind, a perpetual gnawing and craving of the appetite, without any possibility of satisfaction: and indeed is the same in the heart which the *Caninus appetitus* is in the stomach, to which we may aptly enough apply that description we find in the Prophet, *he shall snatch on the right hand and, be hungry, and he shall eat on the left, and not be satisfied*, Esay 9. 20. Where this sharp, this fretting humour abounds, nothing converts into nourishment: every new accession do's but excite some new desire: and as 'tis observ'd of a trencher-fed dog, that he tastes not one bit for the greedy

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expectation of the next; so a discontented mind is so intent upon his pursuits, that he has no relish of his acquests. So that what the Prophet speaks of the Covetous, is equally applyable to all other sorts of Male-contents: *he enlarges his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied,* Hab. 2. 5. And sure if the *desire accomplished* be, as Solomon says, *sweet to the soul,* Prov, 13. 19. it must be exceedingly bitter, to be thus condemned to endless unaccomplishable desires; and yet this is the torture which every repining discontented spirit provides for its self.

13. WHAT a madness is it then for men to be so desperately bent against their interest and duty, as to renounce even their ease too for company? One would think this age were sensual enough to be at defiance with the least shadow of uneasiness. It is so, I am sure, where it ought not; every thing is laborious when 'tis in compliance with their duty: a few minutes spent in prayer, *Oh what a weariness is it!* Mal. 1. 13. If they chance but to miss a meal, they are ready to cry out, their *knees are weak through fasting,* Psal. 109. 24. yet they can without regret, or any self-compassion,

passion, macerate and cruciate themselves with anxious cares and vexations, and as the Apostle speaks, 1 Tim. 6. 10. *pierce themselves thro' with many sorrows.* That proposal therefore which was very rashly made by St. Peter to our Saviour, *Master pity thy self*, Mat. 16. 22. which we render *be it far from thee*, would here be an advised motion to the generality of mankind, who are commonly made unhappy not by any thing without them, but by those restless impatiencies that are within them.

14. IT may therefore be a seasonable office to endeavour the appeasing these storms, by recalling them to those sober rational considerations, which may shew as well the folly, as uneasiness of this repining unsatisfiable humour. 'Tis certain that in true reasoning, we can find nothing whereon to found it, but a great deal to enforce the contrary. Indeed 'tis so much against the dictate of reasonable nature to affect damage, sin, and torment, that were there nothing else to be said but what I have already mention'd, it might competently discover the great unreasonableness of this sin.

15. BUT we need not confine our appeal

peal to reason, as it is only a judge of utility and advantage; but enlarge it to another notion, as it is judge of equity and right: in which respect also it gives as clear and peremptory a sentence against all murmuring impatience. To evince this I shall insist upon these particulars, 1st. That God is a debtor to no man, and therefore whatever he affords to any, it is upon bounty not of right, a benevolence not a due. 2^{ly}. That this bounty is not straight or narrow, confin'd to some few particular persons, and wholly overskipping the rest, but more or less universally diffused to all. So that he who has the least, cannot justly say but he has been liberally dealt with. 3^{ly}. That if we compare our blessings with our allais, our good things with our evil, we shall find our good far surmounting. 4^{ly}. That we shall find them yet more so, if we compare them with the good we have done, as on the contrary we shall find our afflictions scarce discernable, if ballanced with our sins. 5^{ly}. That as God is Rector of the universe, so it appertains to him to make such allotments, such distributions, as may best preserve the state of the whole. 6^{ly}. That God notwithstanding that universal care, has

has also a peculiar aspect on every particular person, and disposes to him what he discerns best for him in special. 7ly. If we compare our adversities with those of other men, we shall always find something that equals if not exceeds our own. All these are certain irrefragable truths, and there is none of them single, but may, if well prest upon the mind, charm it into a calmness and resignation; but when there is such a conspiracy of arguments, it must be a very obstinate perverseness that can resist them: or should they fail to enforce a full conviction, will yet introduce those subsidiary proofs, which I have to alledge, so advantageously, as will, being put all together, amount unto perfect and uncontrollable evidence.

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SECT. II.

Of God's Absolute Sovereignty.

I. THE first proposition that *God is debtor to no man*, is too clear and apparent to require much of illustration: for as he is a free agent, and may act as he pleases, so is he the sole proprietary, and can wrongfully detain from none, because all original right is in himself. This has been so much acknowledged by the blindest Heathens, that none of them durst make insolent addreses to their gods, challenge any thing of them as of debt, but by sacrifices and prayers own'd their dependance and wants, and implor'd supplies. And sure Christianity teaches us not to be more sawcy. If those Deities who ow'd their very being to their votaries, were yet acknowledged to be the spring and source of all, we can with no pretence deny it to that Supreme power in *whom we live, move, and have our being*, Acts 17. 28. For if it were meerly an

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act of his chioce to give us a being, all his subsequnt bounties can have no other original than his own good pleasure. We could put no obligation upon God before we were: and when we began to be, we were his Creatures, and so by the most indisputable right owe our selves to him, but can have no antecedent title on which to claim any thing from him: so that the Apostle might well make the challenge which he doth on God's behalf, *Who hath given any thing unto him, and it shall be recompenc'd to him again?* Rom. 11. 35.

2. Now ordinary discretion teaches us not to be too bold in our expectation from one to whom we can plead no right. It has as little of prudence as modesty, to press impudently upon the bounty of a Patron, and do's but give him temptation (at least pretence) to deny. And if it be thus with men, who possibly may sometimes have an interest, sometimes a vanity to oblige; it must be much more so towards God, who cannot be in want of us, and therefore need not buy us: *our good*, as the Psalmist speaks, *extends not to him*, Psal. 136. 2. He has a fundamental right in that title we are, which will stand good, tho' it should never be corroborated by greater benefits.

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With what an humble bashfulness should we then sue for any thing, who have no argument to invite the least donation, being already so preingag'd, that we cannot mortgage so much as our selves in consideration of any new favour? And surely extravagant hopes do very ill besit people in this condition. We see the modesty of good *Mephibosheth*, tho' he was by a slanderous accusation outed of half the estate *David* had given him, yet upon a reflexion that he deriv'd it all from his good pleasure, disputed not the sentence, but cheerfully resign'd the whole to the same disposure, from which he received it, saying, *Yea, let him take all*, 2 Sam. 19. 30. A rare example and fit for imitation, as being adapted to the present case, not only in that one circumstance of his having receiv'd all from the King, but also in that of the attainder of his blood, which he confesses in the former part of the verse, for *all of my father's house were but dead men before my Lord*. And alas, may we not say the very same? Was not our whole race tainted in our first Parent? So that if God had not the primary title of vassalage, he would in our fall have acquir'd that of confiscation and escheat.

And can we think our selves then in terms to capitulate and make our own conditions, and expect God should humour us in all our wild demands?

3. THIS is indeed to keep up that old rebellion of our Progenitor; for that consisted in a discontent with that portion God had assign'd him, and coveting what he had restrain'd him. Nay indeed, it comes up to the height of the Devil's proposal, the attempting *to be as Gods*. Gen. 3. 5. For 'tis an endeavour to wrest the managery out of his hands, to supersede his Authority of dispensing to us, and to carve for our selves. This is so mad an insolence, that were it possible to state a case exactly parallel between man and man, it would raise the indignation of any that but pretended to ingenuity. Yet this is, without *hyperbole*, the true meaning of every murmuring repining thought we entertain.

4. BUT as bad as it is, who is there of us, that can in this particular say, *we have made our heart clean*? Prov. 20. 9. 'Tis true we make some formal acknowledgment sometimes that we receive all from God's gift: custom teaches us from our infancy after every meal we eat to give him thanks, (tho' even that is now thought too much

much respect, and begins to be discarded as unfashionable :) yet sure he cannot be thought to do that in earnest, that has all the time of his eating been grumbling, that his table abounds not with such delicacies as his neighbours. And yet at this rate God knows are most of our thanksgivings. Indeed, we have not so much ordinary civility to God, as we have to men. The common proverb teaches us not too curiously to pry into the blemishes of what is given us: but on God's gifts we sit as Censors, nicely examine every thing which is any way disagreeable to our fancies, and, as if we dealt with him under the notion of chapmen, disparage it, as *Solomon* says buyers use to do, *it is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer*, Prov. 20. 14. Nay, we seem yet more absurdly to change the scene, and, as if God were to make oblations to us, we as critically observe the defects of his benefactions, as the Levitical Priests were to do those of the Sacrifice, and (like angry Deities) scornfully reject whatever do's not perfectly answer our wanton appetites.

5. AND now should God take us at our words, withdraw all those blessings which we so fastidiously despise, what a
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condition were we in? 'Tis sure we have nothing to plead in reverse of that judgment. There is nothing in it against justice: for he takes but his own. This he intimates to Israel, Hof. 2. 9. *I will return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wooll and my flax:* in which he asserts his own propriety, *my corn, my wine, &c.* and recalls them to the remembrance that they were but usufructuaries: and 'tis as evident that our tenure is but the same. Nay, this proceeding would not be repugnant even to mercy, for even that is not obliged still to prostitute its self to our contempt. I am sure such a tolerance is beyond all the measures of humane lenity. Should any of us offer an alms to an indigent wretch, and he when he sees 'tis Silver, should murmur and exclaim that it is not Gold, would we not draw back our hand, and reserve our charity for a more worthy object? 'Tis true indeed, God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor our narrow bowels equal measures for the divine compassions, and we experimentally find that his long-suffering infinitely exceeds ours; yet we know he do's in the
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parable of the Lord and the servant, *Mat.* 18. declare, that he will proportion his mercy by ours, in that instance; and we have no promise that he will not do it in this: nay, we have all reason to expect he should; for since his wisdom prompts him to do nothing in vain, and all his bounty to us is design'd to make us happy, when he sees that end utterly frustrated by our discontents, to what purpose should he continue that to us which we will be never the better for?

6. BESIDES, tho' he be exceedingly patient, yet he is not negligent or insensible: he takes particular notice, not only with what diligence we employ, but with what affections we resent every of his blessings. And as ingratitude is a vice odious to men, so it is extremely provoking to God, so that in this sense also, the words of our Saviour are most true, from *him that hath not (i. e.) that hath not a grateful sense and value, shall be taken away even that which he hath*, *Matt.* 25. 29. But we may find a threatning of this kind yet more express to Israel, *because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with gladness and with joyfulness of heart, for the abundance of all things, therefore shalt thou*

thou serve thine enemies, whom the Lord God will send among thee, in hunger and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things, Deut. 28. 27, 28. A sad and dismal inversion, yet founded wholly in the want of that cheerful recognition which God expected from them. And if Israel, the lot of his own inheritance, that people whom he had singled out from all the nations of the world, could thus forfeit his favour by unthankfulness, sure none of us can suppose we have any surer entail of it. In a word, as God loves a cheerful giver, so he also loves a cheerful receiver, one that complies with his end in bestowing, by taking a just complacence in his gifts. But the querulous and unsatisfied reproach his bounty: accuse him of illiberality and narrowness of mind. So that he seems even in his honour engag'd to bring them to a righter apprehension of him, and by a deprivation teach them the value of those good things, which they could not learn by the enjoyment.

7. IF therefore ingenuity and gratitude cannot, yet at least let prudence and self-love engage us against this sin of *Murmuring*, which we see do's abundantly justify the character the Wise man gives

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gives when he tells us *'tis unprofitable*. Wisd. 1. 11. he might have said pernicious also, for so it evidently is in its effects. Let us then arm our selves against it, and to that purpose impress deeply upon our minds the present consideration, that God owes us nothing, and that whatever we receive is an alms, and not a tribute. *Diogenes* being asked what wine drunk the most pleasant, answered, that which is drunk at another's cost. And this circumstance we can never miss of to recommend our good things to us: for be they little or much, they come *gratis*. When therefore in a pettish mood we find our selves apt to charge God foolishly, and to think him strait-handed towards us, let us imagine we hear God expostulating with us, as the householder in the parable, *Friend I do thee no wrong: is it not lawfull for me to do what I will with mine own?* Matt. 20. 15. If God have not the right of disposing, let us find out those that have, and see how much better we shall speed; but if he hath, let us take heed of disputing with him: we that subsist meerly by his favour, had need court and cherish it by all the arts of humble observance. Every man is ready to say how ill beggery
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and pride do agree. The first qualification we cannot put off; O let us not provide it of the other so inconvenient, so odious an adjunct. Let us leave off prescribing to God, (which no ingenuous man would do to an earthly benefactor) and let us betake our selves to a more holy and successful policy, the acknowledgment of past mercies, and our own unworthiness. This was *Jacob's* method, *I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which thou hast shew'd unto thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan: and now I am become two bands;* and with this humble preface he introduces his petition for rescue in his present distress. *Deliver me I pray thee from the hand of my brother, &c.* Gen. 31. 10, 11. An excellent pattern of Divine Rhetorick, which the success demonstrates to have been very prevalent. And we cannot transcribe a better copy, to render our desires as successful. Indeed we are so utterly destitute of all arguments from our selves, that we can make no reasonable form of address, if we found it not in something of God: and there is nothing even in him adapted to our purpose, but his mercy; nor can that be so advantageously

SECT. II. *Of God's Absolute Sovereignty.* 27

tageously urged by any thing, as by the former instances it has given of it self; for as God only is fit to be a precedent to himself, so he loves to be so. Thus we find, not only *Moses*, but God often recollecting his miraculous favours towards *Israel*, as an argument to do more: let us therefore accost him in his own way, and by a frequent and grateful recounting of his former mercies, engage him to future. Nor need we be at a loss for matter of such recollection, if we will but seriously consider what we have already received, which is the subject of the next Section.

S E C T. III.

Of God's Unlimited Bounty.

1. **I**T is the known character of an unworthy nature, to write injuries in Marble, and benefits in dust: and however some (as *Seneca* well observes) may acquit themselves of this imputation as to men, yet scarce any do so in relation to God. 'Tis true indeed the charge must be a little varied; for God neither will nor can do us injury; yet we receive any thing that is adverse with such a resentment as if it were, and engrave that in our memories with indelible characters, whilst his great and real benefits are either not all observ'd, or with so transient an advertence, that the comparison of dust is beyond our pitch, and we may be more properly said to write them in water. Nay, so far are we from keeping records and registers of his favours, that even those standing and fixt ones which sense can prompt us to (without the aid of our memories) cannot obtain our notice.

2. **W**ERE it not thus, it were impossible for men to be so perpetually in the com-

complaining key, as if their voices were capable of no other sound. One wants this, and another that, and a third something beyond them both, and so on *ad infinitum*; when all this while every one of them enjoys a multitude of good things without any remark. That very breath wherewith they utter their complaints, is a blessing, and a fundamental one too: for if God should withdraw that, they were incapable of whatsoever else they either have, or desire. 'Tis true that some mens impatiencies have risen so high, as to cast away life, because it was not clothed with all circumstances they wisht. Yet these are rare instances, and do only shew such mens depraved judgment of things. A rich jewel is not the less valuable, because a mad man in his raving fit flings it into the fire: but as to the generality of men, the Devil (tho' a liar) gave a true account of their sense, when he said, *Skin for skin, and all that a man hath will he give for his life*, Job 2. 4. And tho' perhaps in an angry fit many men have with *Jonas*, Chap. 4. 3. *wisht to die*, yet ten to one should death then come, they would be as willing to divert it, as the man in the Apologue was, who wearied
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with his burden of sticks, flung it down and call'd for death, but when he came, own'd no other occasion for him, but to be helpt up again with his bundle. I dare in this appeal to the experience of those, who have seem'd very weary of life, whether when any suddain danger has surpris'd them, it has not as suddenly altered their mind, and made them more desire life, than before they abhorr'd it. 'Tis the common saying, *as long as there is life there is hope*: there is so as to secular concerns; for what strange revolutions do we often see in the age of man? from what despicable beginnings have many arriv'd to the most splendid conditions? Of which we have divers modern as well as ancient instances. And indeed, 'tis admirable to see what time and industry will (with God's blessing) effect. *But there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave*, Eccles. 9. 10. We can improve no more when we are once transplanted thither.

3. BUT this is yet much more considerable in respect of our spiritual state. Our life is the *day wherein we are to work*, Joh. 9. 4. (yea, to work out our salvation) but *when the night comes*, (when death overtakes)

takes) *no man can work.* Now alas when 'tis consider'd how much of this day the most of us have loiter'd away, how many of us have stood idle till the sixth or ninth hour, it will be our concern not to have our day close before the eleventh. Nay alas, 'tis yet worse with us: we have not only been idle, but very often ill busied; so that we have a great part of our time to unravel, and that is not to be done in a moment. For tho' our works may fitly enough be represented by the Prophet's comparison of a *spider's web*, *Isaiah 59. 5.* yet they want the best property even of that; they cannot be so soon undone. Vices that are radicated by time and custom, lie too deep to be lightly swept away. 'Tis no easie thing to perswade our selves to the will of parting with them. Many violences we must offer to our selves, a long and strict course of mortification must be gone thro', ere we can find in our hearts to bid them be gone: and yet when we do so, they are not so tractable as the *Centurion's* servants. They will indeed come when ever we bid them, but they will scarce go so: they must be expell'd by force and by slow degrees; we must fight for every inch of ground we gain

gain from them : and as God would not assist the Israelites to subdue the Canaanites at once, *Deut. 7. 22.* So neither ordinarily do's he us to master perfectly our corruptions. Now a process of this difficulty is not to be dispatcht on a sudden. And yet this is not all our task, for we have not only ill habits to extirpate, but we have also good ones to acquire : it is not a meer negative virtue will serve our turns, nor will empty lamps enter us into the Marriage-chamber, *Matt. 25. 10.* *We must add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, &c.* *2 Pet. 1. 5.* No link must be wanting of that sacred chain, but we must (as the same Apostle advises) *be holy in all manner of conversation, 1 Pet. 1. 15.* VIEW

4. AND now I would desire the Reader seriously to consider, whether he can upon good grounds tell himself that this so difficult (and yet so necessary) a work is effectually wrought in him. If it be, he is an happy man, and can with no pretence complain of any external want : (he that is fed with Manna, must be strangely perverse if he murmur for a belly full of *leeks and onions, Num. 11. 15.*) But on the contrary he owes infinite thanks to God, that

that has spared him time for this important business, and did not put a period to his natural life, before he had begun a spiritual. For I fear there are among the best of us, few of so entire an innocence, but they may remember some, either habits or acts of sin, in which it would have been dreadful for them to have been snatcht away. And then how comprehensive, how prolifick a mercy has life been to them, when it has carried eternity in its womb, and their continuance on earth has qualified them for heaven? Neither are such persons only to look on it as a blessing in the retro-spect, as it relates to the past, but also in the present and future: which if they continue to employ well, do's not only confirm, but advance their reward. Besides, God may please by them to glorifie himself, make them instrumental to his service; which as it is the greatest honour, so it is also the greatest satisfaction to a good heart. He shews himself too mercenary that so longs for his reward, as to grow impatient of his attendances: he that loves God, thinks himself blest in the opportunity of doing work, as well as in receiving wages. Thus we see how life is under all these aspects a mercy to a pious

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man, and such as not only obliges him to contentment, but gratitude.

5. BUT supposing a man cannot give this comfortable account of his life, but is conscious that he has spent it to a very different purpose, yet do's not that at all lessen his obligations to God, who meant he should have employ'd it better, and that he has not done so is meerly his own fault. Nay indeed, the worse his state is, the greater mercy it is, that God has not made it irreverfible, that he has not cut him off at once from the earth, and the possibility of heaven too, but affords him yet a longer *day, if yet he will hear his voice,* Psal. 95. 7. This long-suffering is one of the most transcendent acts of divine goodness, and therefore the Apostle rightly stiles it *the riches of his goodneß, and long-suffering, and forbearance,* Rom. 2. 4. and so at last we commonly acknowledge it, when we have worn it out, and can no longer receive advantage by it. What a value do's a gasping despairing soul put upon a small parcell of that time, which before he knew not how fast enough to squander? Oh that men would set the same estimate on it before! And then certainly, as it would make them better husbands of
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it, so it would also render them more thankful for it, *accounting that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation*, 2 Pet.

3. 15.

6. INDEED did men but rightly compute the benefit of life upon this score, all secular encumbrances and uneasinesses of it would be over-whelm'd, and stand only as Cyphers in the account. What a shame is it then we should spend our breath in sighs and out-cries? Which if we would employ to those nobler ends for which 'twas given, would supersede our complaints, and make us confess we were well dealt with, that *our life* (tho' bare and stript of all outward accessaries) *is given us for a prey*, Jer. 45. 5. And indeed, he that has yet the great work of life to do, can very ill spare time or sorrow to bestow upon the regretting any temporal distress, since his whole stock is little enough to bewail and repair his neglects of his eternal concerns. Were our lives therefore destitute of all outward comfort, nay, were they nothing but a scene of perpetual disasters, yet this one advantage of life would infinitely out-weigh them all, and render our murmuring very inexcusable.

7. BUT God has not put this to the utmost trial, has never plac'd any man in such a state of unmixt calamity, but that he still affords many and great alliaies: he finds it fit sometimes to defalk some of our outward comforts, and perhaps im-bitter others, but he never takes all away. This must be acknowledged, if we do but consider how many things there are of which the whole race of mankind do in common partake. The four Elements, fire and water, air and earth, do not more make up every mans composition, than they supply his needs: the whole Host of Heaven, the Sun, Moon, and Stars, *Moses* will tell us, are by God divided to all nations under the whole heaven, Deut. 4. 19. Those resplendent bodies equally afford their light and influence to all. The Sun shines as bright on the poor Cottage, as on the most magnificent Palace; and the Stars have their benign aspects, as well for him that *is behind the Mill*, as for *him that sitteth on the Throne* Exod. 11. 5. Propriety (the great incendiary below) breeds no confusion in those Celestial Orbs, but they are every mans treasure, yet no mans peculiar, as if they meant to teach us, that our love of appropriation *descends not from above,*

above, Jam. 3. 15. is no heavenly quality.

8. AND as they make no distinction of the ranks and degrees of men, so neither do they of their virtues. Our Saviour tells us, God causes *his Sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*, Mat. 5. 45. If now we descend lower to the sublunary Creatures, they equally pay their homage to man, do not disdain the dominion of the poor, and submit to that of the rich, but shew us that their instinct extends to the whole nature. An horse draws the poor mans plough, as tamely as the Princes chariot, and the beggars hungry Curr follows him with as much obsequiousness and affection, as the pamper'd lap-dogs of the nicest Ladies. The sheep obey a poor mercenary shepherd, as well as they did the Daughters of the wealthy *Laban*, Gen. 29. 9. or of *Jethro* a Prince, *Exod.* 2. 16. and as willingly yield their fleece to clothe *Lazarus*, as to make purple for *Dives*. And as animals, so vegetables are as communicative of their qualities to one man as another. The corn nourishes, the fruits refresh, the flowers delight, the simples cure the poor man as well as the rich.

9. BUT I foresee it will be objected, that

that these natural priviledges are insignificant, because they are evacuated by those positive laws which bound propriety, and that therefore tho' one man could use the creatures as well as another; yet every man has them not to use. I answer, that for some of the things I have mention'd, they are still in their native latitude, cannot be inclos'd or monopoliz'd. The most ravenous oppressor could never yet lock up the sun in his chest: *he that lays house to house, and land to land, till there be no place*, Esay 5. 8. cannot inclose the common air: and the like may be said of divers of the rest: so that there are some (and those no mean) blessings, which continue still the indefeasible right of mankind in general.

10. As for those other things which are liable to the restrictive terms of *meum* and *tuum*, 'tis not to be denied but there is vast difference in the despenfing them; as great as *Nathan's* parable describes, when he speaks of the numerous flocks of the rich man, and the *single ewe lamb of the poor*, 2 Sam. 12. 2. yet there is scarce any so deplorably indigent, but that by one means or other, he has or may have the necessary supports of life. Perhaps they
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fall not into his lap by birth-right and inheritance, yet they are acquirable by labour and industry, which is perhaps the better tenure. They cannot it may be arrive to *Sodom's fulness of bread*, yet if they have not her *abundance of idleness*, Ez. 16. 49. they commonly need not want that, which was the height of *Agur's* wish *food convenient*, Pro. 30. 8. 'Tis true indeed, if they will fold their hands in their bosom, if with *Solomon's sluggard*, *they will not plough by reason of the cold*, they must take his fate in the summer, as they have his ease in the winter, *they may beg in harvest, and have nothing*, Prov. 20. 4. But then 'tis visible they are the Authors of their own necessities. And indeed, to men of such lazy careless natures, 'tis hard to say, what degree of God's bounty can keep them from want, since we often see the fairest fortunes dissipated as well by the supine negligence, as the riotous prodigality of the owners. And therefore if men will be idle, they are not to accuse God, but themselves, if they be indigent.

II. BUT then there is one case wherein men seem more inevitably expos'd, and that is, when by age, sickness, or decrepitness, they are disabled from work,
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or when their family is too numerous for their work to maintain. And this indeed seems the most forlorn state of poverty; yet God has provided for them also, by assigning such persons to the care of the rich: nay, he has put an extraordinary mark of favour on them, given them the honour of being his proxies and representatives, made them *Letters of Attorney* (as it were) to demand relief in his name, and upon his account. And tho' 'tis too true, that even that authority will not prevail with many of the rich to open their purses, yet even in this Age of frozen charity, there are still some who remember upon what terms they received their wealth, and employ it accordingly. And tho' the number of them is not so great as were to be wisht, yet there are in all parts some scattered here and there like *Cities of refuge* in the Land, *Deut. 19. 2.* to which these poor distressed creatures may flee for succour. And I think I may say, that between the legal provisions that are made in this case, and voluntary contributions, there are not very many that want the things that are of absolute necessity: and we know *St. Paul* comprizes those in a small compass, *food and raiment*, and proposes them

them as sufficient materials of Content, 1 *Tim.* 6. 8. I say not this to contract any man's bowels, or lessen his compassions to such poor wretches. For how much soever they lend, I wish as *Joab* did in another case to *David*, the Lord *increase it an hundred-fold*, 2 *Sam.* 24. 3. I only urge it as an evidence of the assertion I am to prove, that no man is so pretermitted by God, or his disposal of temporals, but that even he that seems the most abandon'd, has a share in his Providence, and consequently cannot justly murmur, since even this state which is the highest instance of humane indigence, is not without its receipts from God.

12. BUT the number in this form are but few, compar'd to those in an higher; for between this and the highest affluence, how many intermedial degrees are there, in which men partake, not only of the necessities, but comforts of life; that have not only *food and raiment*, but their distinction of Holy-day and Working-day fare and apparel? He that is but one step advanced from beggery, has so much, he that has got to a second, has more than is necessary, and so every degree rises in plenty, till it comes to vanity and excess.

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And even there too there are gradual risings, some having so much fewel for luxury, that they are at as great a loss for invention, as others can be for materials, and complain that there are no farther Riots left for them to essay. How many are there who have so cloy'd and glutted their senses, that they want some other in-lets for pleasure, and with the rich man in the Gospel, are in distress where to bestow their abundance?

13. AND sure such as these cannot deny that they have receiv'd good things, yet generally there are none less contented; which is a clear demonstration that our repinings proceed not from any defect of bounty in God, but from the malignant temper of our own hearts. And as it is an easier thing to satisfy the cravings of an hungry, than to cure the nauseous recoilings of a surfeited stomach; so certainly the discontents of the poor, are much easier allay'd than those of the rich. The indigence of the one has contracted his desires, and has taught him not to look farther than a little beyond bare necessities, so that a moderate alms satisfies, and a liberal transports him: but he who by a perpetual repletion has his desires stretcht
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and extended, is capable of no such satisfaction. When his enjoyments forestall all particular pursuits, and he knows not upon what to fasten his next wish; yet even then he has some confus'd unform'd appetites, and thinks himself miserable because he cannot tell what would make him more happy. And yet this is that envied state which men with so much greediness aspire to. Every man looks on it as the top of felicity, to have nothing more to wish in the World. And yet alas, even that when attain'd, would be their torment. Let men never think then that contentment is to be caught by long and foreign chases; he is likeliest to find it who sits at home, and duly contemplates those blessings which God has brought within his reach, of which every man has a fair proportion, if he will advert to it.

14. FOR besides those external accessions (of which the meanest have some, the middle sort a great deal, and the uppermost rather too much) man is a principality within himself, and has in his composure so many excellent impresses of his Maker's power and goodness, that he need not ask leave of any exterior thing to be happy, if he knew but aright how

to value himself: the very meanest part of him; his body, is a piece of admirable workmanship, of a most incomprehensible contrivance, as the Psalmist says, *he is fearfully and wonderfully made*; and 'tis astonishing to think of what symmetry of parts this beautiful Fabrick is made up. Nor are they only for shew, but use: every member, every limb is endowed with a particular faculty, to make it serviceable to the whole; and in that admirable texture of veins and arteries, sinews and muscles, nerves and tendons, none are superfluous, but some way or other contribute to vegetation, sense or motion. Nay, the most noble and most useful parts are all of them double, not only as a reserve in case of misadventure of one part; but also as an instance of the bounty of the Donor. And indeed, it is observable of *Galen* in his writings, that after he had taken great care to exempt himself and all of his Profession, from taking notice of the Deity, by saying, That to discourse concerning the Gods, was the task of speculative Philosophers; yet coming to write *de usu partium*, and considering the frame of humane bodies, and therein discovering the wonderful contrivance of every

every part in reference to it's self, and also to the whole, their strength, agility, and various movement, infinitely surpassing the powers of all Mechanick Engines, he seems to have had the fate we read of *Saul* in holy Scripture, and against his *genius* and purpose, to become a Prophet, breaking frequently out into Hymns and sacred raptures; saying, these mysteries are more Divine than the *Samothracian* or *Eleusini-an*; and confessing they both strictly require, and infinitely excel the low returns of humane praise. But beyond the fabrick of parts as organick, what an extract of wonder are our senses, those *five operations of the Lord*, as the son of *Syrach* rightly (and by way of eminence) styles them, *Eccclus. 17. 5*? By these we draw all outward objects of our selves. What were the beauties of the Universe to us, if we had not sight to behold them, or the most melodious sounds, if we had not hearing? and so of the rest. And yet these are not only generally given, but also preserv'd to the greater part of men: and perhaps would be to more, did not our base undervaluing of common mercies, force God sometimes to instruct us in their worth, by making us feel what it is to want them.

15. MULTITUDES of refreshments also God has provided for our bodies, particularly that of sleep, of which he has been so considerate, as in his distributions of time, to make a solemn allotment for it: yet who almost when he lies down, considers the mercy, or when he rises refreshed, rises thankful also? But if our rest at any time be interrupted by the cares of our mind, or pains of our bodies, then, (and not till then) we consider, that 'tis *God who gives his beloved sleep*, Psal. 127. 2. and think it a blessing worth our esteem. Thus it is with health, strength, and every thing else, we despise it whilst we have it, and impatiently desire it whilst we have it not; but in the *interim* sure we cannot complain, that God's hand is shortned towards us, when in the ordinary course of his Providence, we commonly enjoy these mercies many years, which we find so much miss of, if they be withdrawn but for a few hours. And indeed, there is not a greater instance of humane perversity, than our senseless contempt of blessings, merely because they are customary; which in true reason is an argument why we should prize them the more. When we deal with men, we discern it well

well enough; he that gives me once one hundred pounds, I account not so much my Benefactor, as if he had made it my annual revenue; yet God must loose his thanks, by multiplying his favours; and his benefits grow more invisible, by their being always before us.

16. BUT the body (with it's enjoyments) is but the lowest instance of God's bounty, 'tis but a decent case for that inestimable Jewel he has put in it: the Soul, like the Ark, is the thing for which this whole Tabernacle was framed, and that is a spark of Divinity in which alone it is that God accomplished his design of *making man in his own image*, Gen. 1. 26. 'Twould be too long to attempt an exact survey of its particular Excellencies. The mere intellectual powers wherewith it is indued, have exercised the curiosity and raised the admiration of the great contemplators of Nature in all Ages; yet after all, of so subtle a composure is the Soul, that it is inscrutable even to it's self: and tho' the simplest man knows he has the faculties of Imagination, Apprehension, Memory, Reflecting; yet the learnedst cannot assign where they are seated, or by what means they operate. 'Tis enough
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to us that we have them, and many excellent uses for them; one whereof (and a most necessary one) is a thankful reflexion on the goodness of God who gave them. He might have made us in the very lowest form of Creatures, insensible stocks or stones; or if he had advanc'd us a step higher, he might have fixt us among mere Animals, made us perhaps of the noxious, at best of the tamer sort of beasts; but he has plac'd us in the highest rank of visible Creatures, and not only given us *dominion over the works of his hands*, Psalm 8. 6. But has given us Reason wherewith to manage that Sovereignty, without which we had only been the more masterless sort of brutes.

17. YET still the Soul is to be consider'd in an higher notion, that of it's Immortality and capacity of endless Bliss: and here indeed it owns it's extraction, and is an Image of the first Being, whose felicity is coexistent with himself; this, as it is the most transcendent accomplishment of our Nature, so it is most universal. Whatever disparity there may be between man and man in other respects, yet in this all are equal. The poor begger at the gate has a Soul as capacious of

Eternal happiness, as he whose *crumbs* he begs for, (nay sometimes better prepar'd for it, as that parable shews, *Luke 16. 11.*) And tho' the dignities of earth are the prize of the rich and noble, the subtle and designing; yet heaven is as easily mounted from the dung-hill as the throne, and an honest simplicity will sooner bring us thither, than all the *Machiavilian* policy. Nay, God has not only design'd us to so glorious an end, but has done all on his part to secure us of it, sent his Son to lead us the way, his Spirit to quicken us in it. We need not dispute how universal this is; 'tis sure it concerns all to whom I am now speaking, those that are within the pale of the Church: and if it should prove confin'd only to them, the more peculiar is their obligation, that are thus singled out from the rest of the world, and the greater ought to be their thankfulness. The heathen Philosopher made it matter of his solemn acknowledgment to fortune, that he was born a *Grecian* and not a *Barbarian*: and sure the advantages of our *Christianity* are of a much higher strain, and ought to be infinitely more celebrated. The Apostle we find often applauding this glorious privilege, as that

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which makes us *fellow - Citizens with the Saints, and of the household of God*. Eph. 3. 19. Nay, which elevates us to a higher state, *the adoption of sons*, Gal. 4. 5. not only sons, but *Heirs also of God, and joynt-heirs with Christ*, Rom. 8. 17. And what ambition is there so greedy which this will not satisfie? Yet this is our common state, the birth-right of our regeneration, if we do not degrade our selves, and with *Esau* basely sell our title.

18. AND now methinks every man may interrogate himself in the same form, wherein *Jonadab* did *Amnon*, 2 Sam. 13. 4. *Why art thou, being the King's son, thus lean from day to day?* Why should a person who is adopted by the King of Kings, thus languish and pine? What is there below the sun worthy his notice, much less his desires, that hath a kingdom above it? Certainly did we but know how to estimate our selves upon this account, 'twere impossible for us with such sordid contentions to court every petty worldly interest, and so impatiently vex our selves when we cannot attain it. Alas, how unworthily do we bear the name of Christians, when that which carried the Forefathers of our Faith thro' the most fiery trials,

trials, cannot support us under the disappointment of any extravagant desire? They had such *respect to the recompence of the reward*, Heb. 11. 26. as made them cheerfully expose their Fame to ignominy, their Goods to rapine, their Bodies to the most exquisite tortures, and their Lives to death. Yet the same hopes cannot work us to any tolerable degree of patience, when we suffer but the smallest diminution in any of these. What shall we say, is Heaven grown less valuable, or Earth more than it was then? No surely, but we are more infatuated in our estimates: we have so long abetted the rivalry of the hand-maid, that the Mistress like *Sarah*, appears despicable. Like *Jonah* we sit down sullen upon the withering of a gourd, never considering that God has provided us a better shelter, *a building of God eternal in the Heavens*, 2 Cor. 5. 1. Indeed, there can be no temporal destitution so great, which such an expectation cannot make supportable. Were we in *Job's* condition sitting upon a dung-hill, and scraping our selves with a potsherd, yet as long as we can say with him, *our Redeemer liveth*, Job. 19. 25. we have all reason to say with him also, *blessed be the name of the*

Lord, Ch. 1. 21. What a madness is it then for us to expose our selves to be pierc'd and wounded by every temporal adversity, who have so impenetrable an armour? Nay, what an ungrateful contumely is it to that goodness of God, to shew that we cannot make him a counterpoise to the most trivial secular satisfaction? On which account sure he may again take up that exprobrating complaint we find in the Prophet, *A goodly price that I was valued at by them, Zac. 11. 13.*

19. BUT how mean soever he is in our eyes, tho' Christ seem the same to us in his glory, which he did in his abjection, to have *no beauty that we should desire him*; yet he puts another rate upon himself, and tells us, that he *that loves Father or Mother, Son or Daughter more than him, is not worthy of him, Matt. 10. 37.* Now our love and our joy are passions coincident, and therefore whatever we joy more in than we do in him, we may be presum'd to love better; and if he cannot endure the competition of those more ingenuous objects of our love he there mentions, how will he suffer that of our vanities, our childish wanton appetites? And yet those are the things after which we so impatiently

tiently rave. For I believe I may truly affirm, that if there were a scrutiny made into all the discontents of mankind, for one that were fastned upon any great considerable calamity, there are many that are founded only in the irregularity of our own desires.

20. BY what has been said we may justly conclude in the Prophets phrase, *God hath not been to us a wilderness, a land of darkness,* Jer. 2. 31. but has graciously dispens'd to us in all our interests. Yet the instances here given are only common, such as relate to all, or at least the far greater part of mankind: but what volumes might be made, should every man set down his own particular experiences of mercy? In that case 'twould be no extravagant *Hyperbole* we find, Joh. 22. 25. *That even the world it self could not contain the books which should be written.* God knows our memories are very frail, and our observations slight in this point: yet abstracting from all the forgotten or neglected favours, what vast catalogues may every man make to himself, if he would but yet recollect, what effects he has had of God's bounty in giving, of his Providence in protecting, of his Grace in re-

straining and exciting, of his patience in forbearing? And certainly all these productions of the divine goodness were never design'd to die in the birth. The Psalmist will tell us, *The Lord has so done his marvellous works, that they ought to be had in remembrance*, Ps. III. 4. Let every man then make it his daily care to recount to himself the wonders God hath done, as for the children of men in general, so for himself in particular. When the Israelites murmured under their bondage, *Pharaoh* imputes it to their idleness, and prescribes them more work, as the readiest cure: a piece indeed of inhumane Tyranny in him, but may with equity and success be practis'd by us upon our selves. When we find our appetites mutinous, complaining of our present condition, let us set our selves to work, impose it as a task upon our selves, to recollect the many instances of God's mercies. And surely if we do it sincerely, and with intention, we cannot have past thro' half our stages, before our sullen murmures will be beat out of countenance, and retire with shame, when they are confronted with such a cloud of witnesses, such signal testimonies of God's good-

SECT. III. *Of God's Unlimited Bounty.* 55

goodness to us: for when we have mustered up all our little grievances, most critically examin'd all our wants, we shall find them very unproportionable to our comforts, and to our receipts; in which comparative notion, the next Section is to consider them.

SECT.

S E C T. IV.

Of the Surplusage of our Enjoyments above our Sufferings.

1. **T**O regulate our estimate of those things which we either enjoy or suffer, there are three precedent queries to be made: the first of their number or plenty, the second of their weight, the third of their constancy and continuance; for according as they partake more of these properties, every good is more good, and every evil is more evil. It will therefore be our best method of trial in the present case, to compare our blessings and our calamities in these three respects.

2. AND first in that of plenty, the mercies of God are the source of all our good, are set out to us in holy Scripture in the most *superlative* strain. They are *multitudes*, Psal. 102. 20. *Plenteous redemption*, Psal. 130. 7. *As high as the Heaven*, Psal. 120. 11. *He fills all things living with plenteousness*, Psal. 145. 16. His mercies indeed

deed are such as come not within the compass of number, but stretch themselves to infinity, and are best represented by such a calculation as God made to *Abraham*, when he shew'd him the numerousness of his posterity by the innumerableness of the stars, *Gen. 15. 5.* Were there but a single mercy apportion'd to each minute of our lives, the sum would rise very high: but how is our Arithmetick confounded, when every minute has more than we can distinctly number? For besides the original stock mention'd in the last Section, and the accession of new bounty, the giving us somewhat which we had not before; what an accumulative mercy is the preserving what we have? We are made up of so many pieces, have such varieties of interests, Spiritual, Temporal, publick and private; for our selves, for our friends, and dependants; that it is not a confused general regard that will keep all these in security one moment. We are like a vast building, which costs as much to maintain, as to erect. And indeed considering the corruptibleness of our materials, our preservation is no less a work of Omnipotence, than our first forming: nay, perhaps 'tis rather a greater.

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Our original clay tho' it had no aptness, yet it had no averfions to the receiving an humane form ; but was in the hand of the potter to make it what he pleased ; but we now have principles of decay within us, which vehemently tend to diffolution ; we want the supplies of feveral things without us, the failing whereof return us again to our duft. Nay, we do not only need the aid, but we fear the hoftility of outward things. That very air which fometimes refreshes us, may at another ftarve and freeze us : that which warms and comforts, has alfo a power of confuming us. Yea, that very meat which nourishes, may choak and ftifle us. In a word, there is no creature fo defpicable, fo inconfiderable, which may not fometimes ferve us, and which may not at any time (if God permit) ruine us. Now whence is it that we fo constantly, fo frequently find the good, the benign efficacy of thefe things, and fo feldom, fo rarely the evil ? Whence I fay is it, but from the active unwearied providence, which draws forth the better properties of the creatures for our ufe, and reftrains the worfer for our fecurity ; which with a particular advertence, watches not only over every per-
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son, but over every several concern of that person? And how astonishing a contemplation is this? If the meer ebbing and flowing of the sea, put the Philosopher into such an extasie, that he flung himself into it because he could not comprehend the inscrutable cause of it; in what perpetual raptures of admiration may we be, who have every minute within us, and about us, more and greater wonders, and those too in our favour, when we deserve rather the divine power should exert its self in our destruction?

3. BUT alas, our danger from the visible creature, is little, compar'd with those from the spirits of darkness. *We wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with spiritual wickedness, &c.* Eph. 6. 12. So inveterate is the enmity between the Serpent and the seed of the Woman in general, that he watches all advantages against us, not only in our souls, but even our bodies, our goods, and in every part of our concerns. Thus we see he not only assaulted *Job's* soul by the wicked insinuations of his Wife, but (with more effect) his body with boiles and sores, his possessions by the *Chaldeans* and *Sabeans*, and the images
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of himself, his dearest Children, by a wind from the wilderness, *Job* 1. And can we think his malice is now worn out? No surely, he still wishes as ill to mankind as ever, and we should soon see the woful effects of it, did not the same power which let him loose for *Job's* trial, restrain him for our safety. Nay, had he but power to affright, tho' not to hurt us, even that would make our lives very uncomfortable. We cannot hear the relation of Sprights or apparitions, but our blood chills upon it, and an horror runs thro' our veins: what should we then do if he should make his night-walks thro' our chambers, and with his illusory terrors disturb our rest? Yet all this and much more he would do, if God did not chain up this *old Dragon*, *Rev.* 20. Nay, if he were not at the expence of a guard about us, and those no less than Angels. I shall not dispute whether every person hath not his peculiar Guardian: for tho' many have not improbably asserted it, we have ground enough of acquiescence in the general affirmation of the Apostle, *that they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them, who shall be heirs of salvation*, *Hebr.* 1. 14. And now if the Reader please to sum
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up how many are his concerns, and how many are the dangers which await him in them all, he cannot sure render the account of those mercies which preserve the one, and divert the other, in any other phrase than that of the Psalmist, *They are more than I am able to express*, Psal. 40. 7.

4. WE may now challenge the most miserable, or the most querulous man living, to produce causes of complaint, proportionable to those of thanksgiving. He that has the greatest stock of calamities, can never vie with the heaps of benefits; the disproportion is greater than that of the Armies of *Ahab* and *Benhadad*, 1 Kings 20. 27. whereof the one was like *two little flocks of kids*, the other filled the country. God has told us that he *afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men*, Lam. 3. 33. whereas on the contrary, he *delighteth in mercy*, Micah 7. 18. We may judge by our selves which he is likeliest often to repeat, those acts which he doth with regret and reluctancy, or those which he do's with pleasure and delight. But we need no inferences where we have the attestation of experience. Let every man therefore make this his judge in this case, let him every night
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recollect, how many things within and about him he is concern'd in, and consider how many of those have been preserv'd entire to him, still accounting every thing so continued as a new donation. If he begin with his Spiritual state, 'tis too possible he may sometimes find he has lost his innocence, committed some, perhaps many sins: but even in these he will find cause to justifie God, if he do but recollect with what inward checks and admonitions, and outward restraints, God has endeavoured to bridle him. If he will break thro' those fences, that do's not at all derogate from the mercy of God which so guarded him, but it rather illustrates his goodness, that after so many quenchings of his Spirit, do's yet continue his influence. So that even he that has the most deplorably violated his integrity, is yet to confess that God's purpose was to have preserv'd it entire: and he might really so have kept it, had he comply'd with those aids which were afforded him. But in temporal concerns we are not so apt to undermine our selves, and therefore shall much more rarely find we have suffer'd detriment in them, than in our Spiritual; but are there ordinarily like to meet with a better

better account. Let a man therefore consider what is lacking to him of all the secular good things he had in the morning, and tell me whether for the most part he may not give such an account, as the *Israelitish* officers did of their men after the slaughter of the *Midianites*; *that he hath not lost one*, Num. 31. 39. Or if sometimes he do suffer a diminution, yet at the worst he will find that many more good things have been preserv'd to him, than have been taken from him. A man may perhaps meet with some damage in his estate, yet 'tis manifold odds that that damage is but partial, and that he has still more left than is lost. Or if it be more entire; yet if he have his health, his limbs, his senses, his friends, and all things beside his estate left him, so that for one thing he has lost, he still retains a multitude, he may say of it as the disciples of the few loaves, *what is this among so many?* Mat. 14. 17? *Aristippus* being bemoan'd for the loss of a farm, reply'd with some sharpness upon his Condoler, you have but one field, and I have yet three left, why should I not rather grieve for you? Intimating that a man is not so much to estimate what he has lost, as what he has left. A piece
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of wisdom which if we would transcribe, we might quickly convince our selves, that even in our most adverse estate, there are as *Elijah* speaks, *more with us than against us*, 2 Kings 6. 16. that our enjoyments are more than our sufferings, and God's acts of grace do far out-number those of his severity.

5. AND as they do out-number, so also do they out-weigh them. The mercies we receive from God are (as the last Section has shew'd) of the greatest importance; the most substantial solid goods; and the greatest of all, I mean those which concern our eternal estate, are so firmly fixt on us, that unless we will voluntarily quit our claim, 'tis not in the power of men or devils to defeat us. Light bodies are easily blown away by every gust of wind, but this *weight of glory*, as the Apostle calls it, 2 Cor. 4. 17. continues firm and stable, is proof against all storms, like the *shadow of a great rock in a weary land*, Isa. 32. 2. Those dark adumbrations we have of it, might have served to refresh and deceive the tediousness of our pilgrimage, and therefore the most formidable calamities of this life are below all measures of comparison with this hope of our calling, these *riches of the glory of our inheritance*.
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Eph. 3. 16. The heaviest and most pressing of our afflictions are to that, *but like the small dust of the ballance*, Esa. 40. 15. So that if we should here stop our inquisition, we have a sufficient resolution of the present question, and must conclude, that God has given us an abundant counterpoise of all, we either do or can suffer here.

6. IF therefore there be any so forlorn as to Temporals, that he can fetch thence no evidence of God's fatherly care of him, yet this one consideration may solve his doubts, and convince him that he is not abdicated by him. We read of no gifts *Abraham gave Isaac*, yet to the sons of the concubines 'tis said he did, *Gen. 25. 6.* It had been a very fallacious inference, if *Isaac* should have concluded himself neglected, because his far greater portion was but in reversion. And it will be the same in any of us, if we argue an unkindness from any Temporal wants, who have the entail of an Eternal inheritance. But surely *God do's not leave himself without witness*, Acts 14. 17. even in secular things; there is no man breathing but has some blessings of his left hand, as well as his right, as I have already mention'd:

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and unless it be some few prodigies of Calamity, in whose punishment or patience God designs signally to glorifie himself, there are none who enjoy not greater comforts of life than those they want, I mean such as are really greater, tho' perhaps, to their prejudicate fancies they do not appear so. Thus in point of health, if a man be disaffected in one part, yet all the rest of his body may be (and often is) well; or if he have a complication, and have more than one disease, yet there is no man that has all, or half so many as are incident to humane bodies, so that he is comparatively more healthy than sick. So again, it is not very common for a man to loose a limb, or sense; the generality of men keep them to their last; and they who do, have in that an over-balance to most outward adversities; and even they who are so unhappy as to loose one, yet commonly keep the rest; at least the major part: or if at any time any man is left a meer breathing trunk, yet it is by such stupifying diseases as dead the sense, or such mortal ones as soon take them away; and so the remedy overtakes the malady. Besides, it pleases God very often, to make
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compensation for the want of one member or faculty by improving the use of another. We have seen feet supply all the necessary uses of hands to those who have had none; and it is a thing of daily observation that men that are blind, have the greater internal light, have their intellects more vigorous and active, by their abstractions from visible objects.

7. THUS also it is in the matter of wealth; he that is forced to get his bread by the sweat of his brows, 'tis true he cannot have those delicacies wherewith rich men abound; yet his labour helps him to a more poignant, more savoury sauce than a whole College of *Epicures* can compound. His hunger gives a higher gust to his dry crust, then the surfeited stomach can find in the most costly, most elaborate mixtures: so verifying the observation of Solomon, *the full soul loatheth the bony comb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet*, Prov. 27. 7. He cannot indeed stretch himself upon his bed of Ivory, Am. 6. 4. yet his sleeps are sounder than those that can. The wise man tells us, and experience do's so too, that *the sleep of a labouring man is sweet*, Eccles. 5. 12. He is not cloathed gorgeously,

has not the splendor of glittering apparel, so neither has he the care of contriving it, the fears of being fore-stall'd in a new invention, or any of those unmanly sollicitudes which attend that vanity. He has the proper genuine use of cloathing, the preventing shame and cold; and is happily determin'd to that which the wiser men of the world have voluntarily chosen. To conclude, he has one advantage beyond all these; his necessities rescue him from idleness, and all its consequent temptations; which is so great a benefit, that if rich men be not their own task-masters as his wants are his, if they do not provide themselves of business, that one want of theirs is infinitely more deplorable than all his: and he is not only happy comparatively with himself, in having better things than he wants, but with them also.

3. IF we come now to reputation and fame, the account will be much the same: he that is eminent in the world for some great achievement, is set up as an object of every mans remark; when as his excellencies on the one hand are visible, so his faults and blemishes are on the other. And as humane frailty makes it too
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probable, these latter will be really more, so humane envy makes it sure that they shall be more precisely, more curiously observed, and more loudly blazon'd. So that upon the whole, a good quiet security, tho' it be not the road to glory, yet is the likeliest fence against infamy. And indeed, he that can keep up the repute of a sober integrity within his own private sphere, need not envy the triumphant fallies of others, which often meet with a fatal turn at the latter end of the day. But 'twill be said that even that more moderate sort of reputation is not every mans portion, but that many lie under great ignominy and scandals. I shall here ask whether those be just or unjust: If they be just, they belong not to our present subject, which relates only to those inflictions which are the effects of God's immediate Providence, not of our own crimes; for I never doubted but that by those we may divest our selves of any, nay, of all the good things God has design'd us. But if the obloquy be unjust, 'tis probable that 'tis taken up only by ill men, and that the good pass a more equitable sentence; and then surely the attestation of a few such, is able to outweigh

weigh a multitude of the others. And in this case a man may not only find patience but pleasure in reproaches. *Socrates* look'd with trouble and jealousy on himself when ill men commended him, saying, *What ill have I done?* And sure a Christian has a farther reason to be pleas'd with their revilings, they being his security against the *woe* pronounced to those *whom all men speak well of*, Luke 6. 26. But sometimes it happens, that even good men are seduc'd, and either by the artifices of the wicked, or their own too hasty credulity, give credit to unjust reports. And this I confess is a sharp trial to the injur'd person, yet even this cannot often be universal; there can scarce be any innocence so forlorn but that there may be opportunities of clearing it to some or other, and by them propagating it to more; and if the cloud ever come to be dispers'd, their fame will appear with the brighter lustre. But if none of this happen, they have yet a certain and more blessed retreat, even an appeal to the unerring judge, who never beholds us with more approbation, than when we are under the unjust condemnation of men. Indeed we have then a double tie upon him,
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not only his justice but his pity is concern'd in our cause. God particularly owns himself as the refuge of the oppressed, and there is scarce a sharper and more sensible oppression than this of Calumny: yet even this proves advantage, whilst it procures God's immediate Patronage, makes us the objects of his more peculiar care and compassion, who can *make our righteousness as clear as the light*, Psal. 37. 6. if he see it fit; but if in his wisdom he choose not that for us, 'tis comfort enough for us that we have approv'd it to him. 'Twas *Elkanah's* question to *Hannah* in her disconsolation, *Am not I better to thee than ten sons?* 1 Sam. 1. 8. And sure we may say the like of God's approbation, that 'tis better to us, I say not then ten, but ten thousand Eulogies of men. The very Echo of it in the testimony of a good conscience is an unspeakable comfort, and this voice sounds more audibly, more sweetly, among the loudest, the harshest accusations of men. So that we see even this assault too is not without it's guard, and these *waters of Marah*, Exod. 15. 23. may be render'd not only wholesome but pleasant.

9. I have not instanced in the three most general concerns of humane life, the

Body, Goods, and Fame, to which heads may be reduced most of the afflictions incident to our out-ward state, as far as immediately concerns our selves. But there is no man stands so single in the world, but he has some relations or friends in which he thinks himself interested, and many times those oblique strokes which wound us thro' them, are as painful as the more direct: yet here also God is ordinarily pleas'd to provide some allaiies, if we would but take notice of them. He who has had one friend die, has ordinarily divers others surviving; or if he have not that, usually God raises him up others. 'Tis true we cannot have a succession of Fathers and Mothers, yet we often have of other friends that are no less helpful to us: and indeed there are scarce in any thing more remarkable evidences of Providence, than in this particular. *He that is able out of stones to raise up children to Abraham*, Mat. 3. 9. do's many times by as unexpected a production supply friends to the desolate. But we do sometimes loose our friends while they are living, they withdraw their kindness which is the soul of friendship: and if this happen by our own demerit, we can accuse
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neither God nor them for it: nor can we rationally expect that God should provide supplies, when we wilfully dispoil our selves. But when they are unkind without provocation, then is the season for his interposition, who uses to take up *those whom Father and Mother forsake*, Psal. 27. 10. And we frequently see signal proofs of his care in exciting the compassions of other friends and relatives, or perhaps of meer strangers. Nay, sometimes God makes the inhumanity of a man's relations, the occasion of his advantage. Thus the barbarous malice of *Joseph's* brethren, was the first step to his Dominion over Egypt. And 'tis a common observation in families, that the most discountenanc'd child oft makes better proof than the darling.

10. WE are yet liable to a third affliction by the calamity of our friends, which by the sympathy of kindness presses us no less (perhaps more) sensibly than our own: but then 'tis to be consider'd, that theirs are capable of the same allaying circumstances that ours are, and God has the same arts of alleviating their burdens; so that we have the same arguments for acquiescence in their sufferings

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that we have in our own; and shall do a more friendly office in impressing those upon them, than in the most passionate adopting of their sorrows.

II. THE last and greatest discomfort from friends, is that of their sin: and if ever we may be allow'd that disconsolate strain of the Prophet, Esa. 22. 4. *Turn away from me, I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me; this seems to be the time.* Yet even this *vally of Achor is not without a door of hope*, Hos. 2. 15. A vicious person may be recalled, multitudes have been; so that so long as God continues life, we ought no more to deposite our hope than to quit our endeavour. Besides, there are few that make this complaint that have not something to ballance, or at least to lighten it. I shall instance in that relation which is the nearest and most tender, that of a Parent. He that has one bad child may have divers good. If he have but one virtuous, 'tis a very great mercy, and 'tis another that he may be the better taught to value it by the opposition of the contrary. But if any be so unhappy as to have many children, and *all to consume his eyes, and to grieve his heart*, 1 Sam. 2. 33. it may be a seasonable reflexion
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for him to examine how far he has contributed to it, either by *Elie's* fond indulgence, or by a remiss and careless Education: or which is worst of all, by his most impious example. If any, or all of these be found the cause, he is not so much to seek for allaiies to his grief, as for pardon of his sin: and when he has penitently retracted his own faults, he may then have better ground of hope that God may reform those of his children. In the mean time he may look on his own affliction in them as God's discipline on him, and gather at least this comfort from it, that his heavenly Father has more care of him than he had of his; and do's not leave him uncorrected.

12. THUS we see in all the concerns (which are the most common and important of humane life, and wherein the justest of our complaints are usually founded) there is such a temperature and mixture, that the good do's more than equal the ill; and that not only in the grosser bulk, when our whole state is weigh'd together, but in every single branch of it: God having herein dealt with this little world, Man, as he has done with the greater, wherein he is observ'd to have

furnished every country with specifick remedies for their peculiar diseases. I have only given these short hints by way of essay and pattern for the Readers contemplation, which, when he shall have extended to all those more minute particulars wherein he is especially concern'd, more curiously compar'd his sufferings with his allaies and comforts: I cannot doubt but he will own himself an instance of the truth of the present *Thesis*, and confess, that he has much more cause of thankfulness than complaint.

13. THIS I say supposing his afflictions to be of those more solid and considerable sort I have before mention'd. But how many are there who have few or none of such, who seem to be seated in the land of *Goshen*, in a place exempt from all the plagues that infest their neighbours? And those one would think should give a ready suffrage to this conclusion, as having no temptation to oppugn it; yet I doubt not far otherwise, and that such men are of all the most unsatisfied. For tho' they have no crosses of God's imposing, they usually create a multitude to themselves. And here we may say with *David*, it is better to fall into the hands of God, than into the

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the hand of man, 2 Sam. 24. 14. 'tis easier to bear the afflictions God sends, than those we make to our selves. His are limited both for quantity, and quality, but our own are as boundless as those extravagant desires from which they spring.

14. AND this is the true cause why contentment is so much a stranger to those who have all the outward causes of it. They have no definite measure of their desires; 'tis not the supply of all their real wants will serve their turn: their appetites are precarious and depend upon contingencies. They hunger not because they are empty, but because others are full. Many a man would have liked his own portion well enough, had he not seen another have something he liked better. Nay, even the most inconsiderable things acquire a value by being anothers, when we despise much greater of our own. *Ahab* might well have satisfied himself with the Kingdom of *Israel*, had not *Naboth's* poor *Plat* laid in his eye; but so raving were his desires after it, that he dis-relishes all the pomps of a Crown, yea, the ordinary refreshments of Nature, *can eat no bread* till he have that to furnish him with *Sallads*, 1 Kings 21. 2. And how many
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are there now adays whose clothes fit uneasie, if they see another have had but the luck to be a little more ingeniously vain; whose meat is unfavoury if they have seen but a greater rarity, a newer cookery at anothers Table: in a word, who make other peoples excesses the standard of their own felicities?

15. NOR are our appetites only excited thus by our outward objects, but precipitated and hurried on by our inward lusts. The proud man so longs for homage and adoration, that nothing can please him if that be wanting. *Haman* can find no gust in all the sensualities of the *Persian* Court, because a poor despicable *Jew* denies his obeisance, *Esth.* 5. 13. The lustful so impatiently pursues his impure designs, that any difficulty he meets in them, makes him pine and languish like *Amnon*, who could no way recover his own health, but by violating his sisters honour, *2 Sam.* 13. 14. The revengeful labours under an hydropic thirst till he have the blood of his enemy: all the liquor of *Abfalon's* sheep-shearing could not quench his, without the slaughter of his brother, *2 Sam.* 13. 22. And thus every one of our passions keeps us upon the rack till they have

have obtained their designs. Nay, when they have, the very emptiness of those acquisitions is a new torment, and puts us upon fresh pursuits. Thus between the impetuosity of our desires, and the emptiness of our enjoyments, we still *disquiet our selves in vain*, Psal. 39. 7. And whilst we have such cruel task-masters, 'tis not strange to find us groaning under our burdens. If we will indulge to all our vicious or foolish appetites, think our lives bound up with them with as impatient a vehemence, as *Rachel* did for children, Gen. 30. 1. *give me them or I die*: no wonder that we are always complaining of disappointments, since in these the very success is a defeat, and is but the exchanging the pain of a craving ravenous stomach, for that of a cloy'd and nauseated. Indeed men of this temper condemn themselves to a perpetual restlessness; they are like phantastick mutineers, who when their superiours send them blanks to write their own conditions, know not what will please them: and even Omnipotence itself cannot satisfy these, till it have new moulded them, and reduced their desires to a certainty.

16. BUT in the mean time how unjustly do they accuse God of illiberality, because every thing answers not their humour? He has made them reasonable creatures, and has provided them satisfactions proportionable to their nature; but if they will have wild irrational expectations, neither his wisdom, nor his goodness is concern'd to satisfy those. His supplies are real and solid, and therefore have no correspondence to imaginary wants. If we will create such to our selves, why do we not create an imaginary satisfaction to them? 'Twere the merrier frenzy of the two, to be like the mad *Athenian*, that thought all the ships that came into his harbour his own: and 'twere better *Ixion*-like, to have our arms fill'd with a cloud, than to have them perpetually beating our own breasts, and be still tormenting our selves with unsatisfiable desires. Yet this is the state to which men voluntarily subject themselves, and then quarrel at God because they will not let themselves be happy. But sure their very complaints justify God, and argue that he has dealt very kindly with them, and afforded them all the necessary accommodations of life: for did they want them,

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they would not be so sensible of the want of the other. He that is at perfect ease may feel with some vexation the biting of a flea or gnat, which would not be at all observable if he were upon the rack. And should God change the scene, and make these nice people feel the destitution of necessaries; all these regrets about superfluities would be over-whelm'd. In the mean time how deplorable a thing is it, that we are still the poorer for God's bounty, that those to whom he has opened his hand widest, should open their mouth so too, in out-cries and murmurs? For I think I may say, that generally those that are the farthest remov'd from want, are so from content too; they take no notice of all the real substantial blessings they enjoy, leave these (like the ninety nine sheep in the wilderness) forgotten and neglected, to go in quest after some fugitive satisfaction, which like a shadow flies still faster in proportion to their pursuit.

17. AND now would God they could be recalled from this unprofitable chase, and instead of the Horseleaches note *Give, give*, Prov. 30. 15. take up that of the Psalmist, *What shall I render to the Lord*

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for all the benefits he hath done unto me? Psal. 116. 12. Let them count how many valuable or rather inestimable things, they have received from his mercy, and then confront them with those corrections they have found from his justice; and if they do this impartially, I doubt not they will find wherewithall to check their highest mutinies; and will join with me in confessing, that their good things abundantly out-weigh their ill.

18. IF now we carry on the comparison to the last circumstance, and consider the constancy, we shall find as wide a difference. Let us take the Psalmist's testimony, and there will appear a very distant date of his mercies and punishments. *His mercies endure for ever*, Psal. 136. whereas *his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye*, Psal. 30. 5. And accordingly God owns his acts of severity as his *strange work*, Isa. 28. 21. That which he resorts to only upon special emergencies; but his mercies *are renewed every morning*, Lam. 3. 23. and doubtless we may all upon trial affirm the same. There are many of the most necessary comforts of life, which do not only sometimes visit us as guests, but dwell with us as in-mates and domesticks. How many

many are there who have lived in a perpetual affluence from their cradles to their graves, have never known what it is to want? And tho' the goods of fortune are perhaps less constant to some, yet the refreshments of nature are usually so to us all. We eat and drink, we sleep, we recreate, we converse in a continued circle, and go our round almost as constantly as the Sun do's his. Or if God do's sometimes a little interrupt us in it, put some short restraint upon our refreshments, yet that comparatively to the time we enjoy them, is but proportionable to the stop he has sometimes made of the Sun, *Josh.* 10. 13. *2 Kings* 20. 8. or of the Sea, *Exod.* 14. 21. which as they were no subversions of the course of nature, so neither are those short pauses he sometimes makes, a repeal of those fixt and customary benefits his Providence usually allots us. But who is there can say, that any one of his afflictions have been of equal continuance, or has prest him with so few intermissions? Perhaps he may have missed some few nights sleep: but what is that to a twelve-months, or perhaps a whole lives enjoying it? 'Tis possible his stomach and his meat have not always been ready to-

gether; but how much oftner have they met to his delight? And generally things that are most useful, are but rarely interrupted. Nay, to a great many even the delicacies of life are no less constant, and their luxuries are as quotidian as their bread: whereas unless their vices or their fancies create uneasinesses to them, those that come immediately from God's hand make long intermissions and short stays. Yet for all this, they that should measure by the uncessantness of men's complaints, would judge that the scene was quite reversed, and that our good things are, as *Job* speaks, *swifter than a weavers shuttle*, *Job* 7. 6. whilst our ill, like *Gehazies leprosie*, *cleave inseparable to us*, *2 Kings* 5, 27.

19. THE truth is, we will not let our selves enjoy those intervals God allows us, but when a calamity do's retire, we will still keep it in fiction and imagination; revolve it in our minds, and because it is possible it may return, look upon it as not gone. Like *Aguish* patients, we count our selves sick on our well-day, because we expect a fit the next. A strange stupid folly thus to court vexation, and be miserable in *Chimera*. Do's any man
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or indeed any beast, desire to keep a distastful relish still in his mouth, to chew the cud upon gall and wormwood? yet certainly there are a multitude of people whose lives are imbitter'd to them, merely by these fantastick imaginary sufferings. Nor do we only fright our selves with images and Ideas of past calamities, but we dress up new bugg-bears and mormo's, are Poetick and Aerial in our inventions, and lay Romantick scenes of distresses. This is a thing very incident to jealous natures, who are always raising alarms to themselves. A suspicious man looks on every body with dread. One man he fears has designs upon his fortune, another on his reputation, perhaps a third upon his life: whilst in the mean time, the only ill design against him is managed by himself; his own causeless fears and jealousies, which put him in a state of hostility with all the world; and do often betray him to the very things he groundlessly suspected. For it is not seldom seen that men have incurr'd real mischiefs by a fond solicitude of avoiding imaginary ones. I do not question but this is a state calamitous enough, and shall acknowledge it very likely

likely that such persons shall have little or no truce from their troubles, who have such an inexhausted spring within themselves; yet we may say to them as the Prophet did to the house of *Jacob*, *Is the spirit of the Lord straitned? are these his doings?* Micah 2. 7. Such men must not cry out that God's hand lies heavy upon them, but their own; and so can be no impeachment to the truth of our observation, that God's blessings are of a longer duration, keep a more fixt steady course than his punishments. The result of all is, that the generality of mankind have good things (even as to Temporals) which do in the three respects fore-mention'd, exceed the ill. I mean the true and real ills which God sends, tho' not those fanciful ones they raise to themselves.

20. AND now why should it not appear a reasonable proposition, that men should entertain themselves with the pleasanter parts of God's dispensations to them, and not always pore upon the harsher: especially since the former are so much a fairer object, and perpetually in their eye? Why should we look on the

the more sadning spectacles of humane frailty or misfortune, thro' all the magnifying opticks our fancies can supply, and perversly turn away our eyes from the cheerfuller? Yet this God knows is too much the case with most of us. How nicely and critically do we observe every little adverse accident of our lives? What tragical stories of them do our memories present us with? When alas, a whole current of prosperity glides by without our notice. Like little children, our fingers are never off the sore place, till we have pickt every light scratch into an ulcer. Nay, like the lewder sort of beggars, we make artificial sores to give us a pretence of complaint. And can we then expect God should concern himself in the cure? Indeed in the course of his ordinary Providence, there is no cure for such people, unless it be by revulsion, the making them feel the smart of some very great and pressing affliction. They therefore put themselves under an unhappy *dilemma*, either to continue their own tormentors, or to endure the severest course of God's discipline. 'Tis true the last is the more eligible,

eligible, but I am sure the best way is to prevent both, by a just and grateful sense of God's mercies, which will be yet farther illustrated, if we compare them with our own demerits.

the Christian? For the Christian is too much the case with most of us. How much and critical do we observe every little accident of our lives? What logical horrors of them do our more prudent us wish? Which alas, a whole current of prosperity glides by without our notice. Like little children, our eyes are never off the toy place, till we have pickt every light trinket into an insect. Nay, like the fowler lost of peggry, we make artificial forest to give us a pretence of complaint. And can we then expect God should concern himself in the case? Indeed in the course of his ordinary Providence, there is no cure for such people, unless it be by reviving the waking them feel the smart of some very great and pressing affliction. They therefore put themselves under an unhappy delusion, either to consider their own commentators, or to endure the severest course of God's discipline. The truest is the more eligible.

SECT.

SECT. V.

Of our Demerit towards God.

1. **I**T is the common fault of our nature, that we are very apt to be partial to our selves, and to square our expectations more by what we wish, than by what we deserve. Something of this is visible in our dealings with men. We oft *look to reap where we have not sowed*, Matt. 25. 25. expect benefits where we do none: yet in civil transactions there are still remaining such foot-steps of natural justice, that we are not universally so unreasonable: all traffick and commerce subsisting upon the principle of equal retribution, giving one good thing for another equivalent; so that no man expects to buy corn with chaff, or gold with dross. But in our dealings with God, we put off even this common equity; are vast in our expectations, but penurious and base in our returns; and, as if God were our steward, not our Lord, we require of him with a confidence proper only to those who ask their

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own: whilst in the *interim*, what we offer to him is with such a disdainful slightness, as if we meant it rather as an alms than an homage.

2. GOD indeed is so munificent, that he *prevents us with his blessings*, Psal. 21. 3. gives us many things before we ask: had he not done so, we could not have been so much as in a capacity of asking. But tho' the first and fundamental mercies are absolute and free, yet the subsequent are conditional: and accordingly we find in scripture, that God makes no promise either concerning this life or a better, but on condition of Obedience. The *Jews* who had much larger proposals of Temporal happiness than *Christians* have, yet never had them upon other terms. God expressly articulated for the performance of his commands, and made all their enjoyments forfeitable upon the failure, as we may see at large in the book of *Deuteronomy*. And under the Gospel, St. Paul appropriates the *promises as well of this life, as of that to come unto Godliness*, 1 Tim. 4. 8. It will therefore be a material inquiry for every man, whether he have kept his title entire, and have not by breach of the condition forfeited his claim, even to the most common

mon ordinary blessings; for if he have, common reason will tell him he can challenge none: and that the utmost he can hope for, must be only upon a new score of unmerited favour.

3. AND here certainly *every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God*, Rom. 3. 19. For alas, who is there that can say, his obedience has been in any degree proportionable to his obligation? 'Tis manifest we have all received abundantly from God's hand, but what has he had from ours? I may challenge the best man, to cast up the account of his best day, and tell me whether his receipts have not infinitely exceeded his disbursements: whether for any one good thing he has done, he has not received many. Nor is the disparity only in number, but much more in value. God's works are perfect, all he do's for us like the first six days productions *are all very good*, Gen. 1. but alas, our very *righteousness is as filthy rags*, Isai. 64. 6. We offer *him the blind and the lame*, Mal. 1. 8. a few yawning drowsie prayers perhaps, wherein he has the least share: the fuller current of our thoughts running towards our secular or sinful concerns. We drop it may be a scanty Alms,

wherein 'tis odds our vain-glory scrambles for a share with him, if it do not wholly engross it. We sit an hour at a sermon, but 'tis rather to hear the wit or eloquence of the Preacher, than the word of God. Like the duller sort of animals, we like well to have our itching ears scratcht, but grow sturdy and restive when we should do what we are there taught. In a word, all our services at the best are miserably maim'd and imperfect; and too often corrupt and unsound. So that God may well upbraid us as he did *Israel*, *Offer it now to thy governour, will he be pleas'd with it?* Mal. i. 8. These very iniquities of our holy things, are enough to defeat all our pretences to any good from God's hand. Yet God knows this is much the best side of us: 'tis not every one that can make so fair an appearance as this amounts to. With many there is no place to complain of the blemishes of their sacrifices, for they offer none, of whom we may say in the words of the Psalmist, *God is not in all their thoughts*, Psal. 10. 4. I fear there want not those who drive away the day, the week, nay the year, without remembering in whose *hand their time is*, Psal. 31. 15. or paying him any solemn tribute
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of it; who enjoy the services of all inferior creatures, without considering that theirs are more due to the supreme Lord: in a word, who live as if they were absolutely independent; had their existence purely from themselves, and had no Creator to whom they owed their being, or any consequent duty. And sure men who thus discard themselves from God's family, have very little reason to expect the provisions of it: yet even such as these have the impudence to complain, if any thing be wanting to their needs (shall I say) or to their lusts; can ravingly profane God's name in their impatencies, which they know not how to use in their prayers: as if the Deity were considerable in no other notion, than that of their Caterer or Steward.

4. IF now we seriously reflect, what can be more admirable than that infinite patience of God; who notwithstanding the miserable infirmities of the pious, and the lewd contempt of the impious, still goes on resolutely in his bounty, and continues to all mankind some, and to some all his temporal blessings? He has no obligation of justice to do so, for it is no part of his compact; he has none of gratitude,

titude, for he is perpetually affronted and disobliged. Surely we may well say with *David*, *Is this after the manner of men, O Lord?* 2 Sam. 7. 19. Can the highest humane indulgence bear any proportion with this divine clemency? No certainly, no finite patience but would be exhausted with the thousandth part of our provocations.

5. BUT is not our dealing too as little after the manner of men; I mean of reasonable Creatures? For us who have forfeited our right to all, and yet by meer favour are still kept in the possession of many great blessings: for us to grow mutinous, because there is perhaps something more trifling which is deny'd us, is such a stupid ingratitude, as one would think impossible to humane nature. Should a tenant with us have at once forfeited his lease, and maliciously affronted his Landlord, he would sure think himself very gently dealt with, if he were suffer'd to enjoy but a part of his first estate; but we should think him not only insolent, but mad, who when the whole were left him, should quarrel and clamour if he might not have his Cottage adorn'd with marble floor, and gilded roofs. Yet at this wild
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rate we behave our selves to our great Landlord, grow pettish and angry if we have not every thing we can fancy, tho' we enjoy many more useful, meerly by his indulgence. And can there be any thing imagin'd more unreasonable? Let us therefore if not for piety, yet at least to justifie our claim to rationality, be more ingenuous; let us not consult only with our fond appetites, and be thus perpetually solliciting their satisfaction; but rather reflect on what tenure we hold what we already have, even that of superabundant mercy; and fear, lest like insolent beggars by the impudence of our demands, we divert even that charity which was design'd us. In short, let every man when he computes what he wants of his desires, reckon as exactly how much he is short of his duty; and when he has duly ponder'd both, he will think it a very gentle composition to have the one unsupplied, so he may have the other remitted; and will see cause contentedly to sit down and say with honest *Mephibosheth*, *What right have I to cry any more unto the King?* 2 Sam. 19. 28. But if it be thus with us upon the meer score of our imperfections or omissions, what an obnoxious state do

our innumerable actual sins put us in? If the spots of our sacrifices are provoking, what are our sacrileges and bold profanations? If those who neglect or forget God are listed among his enemies, what are those who avowedly defie him? Indeed he that soberly considers the world, and sees how daringly the divine Majesty is daily affronted, cannot but wonder that the perversions of our manners, those prodigies in morality, should not be answer'd with as great prodigies in calamity too; that we should ever have other ruine than that of *Sodom*, or the earth serve us for any other purpose than to be, as it was to *Korah*, *Num.* 16. our living sepulchre.

6. NOR is the longanimity of God observable only towards the mass and collective body of mankind, but to every man in particular. Who is there that if he ransack his conscience, shall not find guilts enough to justifie God in the utmost severities towards him; so that how much soever his punishments are short of that, so much he evidently owes to the lenity and compassion of God? And who is there that suffers in this world the utmost that God can inflict? We have a great many suffering capacities, and if those
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were all fill'd up to the height, our condition would scarce differ from that of the damned in any thing but duration. But God is more merciful, and never inflicts at that rate on us here. Every man's experience can tell him, that God discharges not his whole quiver at once upon him, but exempts him in many more particulars than he afflicts him; and yet the same experience will probably tell most of us, that we are not so modest in our assaults upon God; we attack him in all his concerns (as far as our feeble malice can reach,) in his Sovereignty, in his Honour, in his Relatives, nay, sometimes in his very Essence and Being. And as they are universal in respect of him, so also in regard of our selves: we engage all our powers in this war, do not only *yield* (as the Apostle speaks) *our members instruments of unrighteousness*, Rom. 6. 13. but we press them upon the service of sensual and vile lusts, even beyond our native propensions. Nor are only the members of our body, but the faculties of our souls also thus employ'd; our understandings are busied first in contriving sins, and then excuses and disguises for them; our wills are yet more sturdy rebels, and when the understand-

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ing is beat out of all it's out-works, yet fullenly keep their hold in spight of all conviction; and our affections madly rush on *like the horse into the battle*, Jer. 8. 6. deterred by nothing of danger, so there be but sin enough in the attempt.

7. AND now with what face can people that thus pursue an hostility, expect that it should not be return'd to them? Do's any man denounce war, and yet expect from his adversary all the caresses, the obligements of friendship? Self-defence will prompt even the meekest nature to despoil his enemy at least of those things which he uses to his annoiance; and if God should give way even to that lowest degree of anger, where or what were we? For since we employ our whole selves against him, nothing but destruction can avert our injuries. But 'tis happy for us we have to do with one who cannot fear us, who knows the impotence of our wild attempts, and so allayes his resentment of our insolence, with his pity of our follies. Were it not for this, we should not be left in a possibility so oft to iterate our provocations; every wicked imagination and black design, would be at once defeated and punish'd by infatuation

tion and frenzy; every blasphemous Atheistical speech would wither the tongue, like that *arm of Jeroboam* which he stretch't against the Prophet, *1 Kings* 13. 4. and every impious act would like the prohibited retrospect of *Lot's* wife, fix us perpetual monuments of divine vengeance.

8. AND then how much do we owe to the mercy and commiseration of our God, that *he suffers not his whole displeasure to arise*, *Psal.* 78. 39. that he abates any thing of that just severity he might use towards us? He that is condemned to the Gallows, would think it a mercy to scape with any inferior penalty: why have we then such mean thoughts of God's clemency, when he descends to such low compositions with us; corrects us so lightly as if 'twere only matter of ceremony and punctilio, the regard of his honour, rather than the execution of his wrath? For alas, let him among us that is the most innocent, and undeservedly afflicted, muster up his sins and sufferings, and he will see a vast inequality: and (had he not other grounds of assurance) would be almost tempted to think those were not the provoking cause, they are so unproportionably answered. He sins in innumerable instances, and is

punish'd in few ; he sins habitually and perpetually, and suffers rarely and seldom ; nay, perhaps he has sometimes sinn'd with greediness, and yet God has punish'd with regret and reluctancy. *How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim?* Hos. 11. 8. And when all these disparities are consider'd, we must certainly join heartily in *Ezra's* confession, *Thou O God has punisht us less than our iniquities deserve,* Ezra 9. 13.

9. NAY, besides all our antecedent, we have after-guilts no less provoking, I mean our ungracious repinings at the light chastisements of our former sins, our out-cries upon every little uneasiness, which may justly cause God to turn our whips into scorpions ; and according as he threatned *Israel*, Lev. 26. 18. *to punish us yet seven times more.* And yet even this do's not immediately exasperate him. The *Jews* were an instance how long he could bear with a murmuring generation ; but certainly we of this Nation are a greater : *yet let us not be high-minded but fear,* Rom. 11. 20. For we see at last the doom fell heavy tho' it was protracted : a succession of miraculous judgements pursued those murmurers, so that not one of them enter'd *Canaan*. And it's very obser-

observable, that whereas to other sins God's denunciations are in Scripture conditional and reverſible; this was abſolute and bound with an oath, *He ſware in his wrath that they ſhould not enter into his reſt*, *Pſal.* 95. 11. And yet if we compare the hardships of the *Iſraelites* in the wilderneſs, with moſt of our ſufferings, we ſhall be forced to confeſs our mutinies have leſs temptation, and conſequently leſs excuſe; from whence 'tis very reaſonable to infer, as the greatneſs of our danger if we perſiſt, ſo the greatneſs of God's long-ſuffering towards us, who yet allows us ſpace to reform: and ſure new complaints ſound very ill from us, who are lyable to ſo ſevere an account for our old ones. I fear the moſt reſign'd perſons of us will upon recollection find, they have upon one occaſion or other out-vied the number of the *Iſraelites* murmurs, therefore unleſs we will emulate them in their plagues, let us fear to add one more, leſt that make up the fatal ſum, and render our deſtruction irrevocable.

10. UPON all theſe conſiderations it appears, how little reaſon any of us have to repine at our heaviest preſſures. But there is yet a farther circumſtance to be
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adverted to, and is too applicable to many of us, that is, that our sins are not only the constant meritorious cause of our sufferings, but they are also very often the instrumental cause also; and produce them not only by way of retaliation from God, but by a natural efficacy. Solomon tells us, he that *loves pleasure shall be a poor man*, and that *a whorish woman will bring a man to a piece of bread*, Prov. 6. 26. That *he that sits long at the wine shall have redness of eyes*, Chap. 23. 29, 30. That *the slothful soul shall suffer hunger*, 19. 15. And all these not by immediate supernatural infliction from God, but as the proper genuine effects of those respective vices. Indeed God in his original establishment of things, has made so close a connexion between sin and punishment, that he is not often put to exert his power in any extraordinary way, but may trust us to be our own *Lictors*, our own *backslidings* reprove us, Jer. 2. 19. and our *iniquities* are of themselves enough to *become our ruine*, Ezek. 18. 30.

11. IT may therefore be a seasonable question for every man to put to himself, whether the troubles he labours under be not of this sort; whether the poverty he
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complains of, be not the effect of his riot and profusion, his sloth and negligence? whether when he cries out that *his comeliness is turned into corruption*, Dan. 10. 8. he may not answer himself, that they are his visits to the harlots house which have thus made *rottenness enter into his bones*, Hab. 3. 16. whether when he is beset with contentions, and has wounds without cause, *he have not tarried long at the wine*; when he has lost his friend, whether he have not by some *treacherous wound*, Ecclus. 22. 22. forced him to depart: or when he lies under infamy, whether it be not only the *Eccho* of his own scandalous crimes. If he find it thus with him, certainly his mouth is stopt, and he cannot without the most disingenuous impudence complain of any but himself. He could not be ignorant that such effects did naturally attend such causes, and therefore if he would take the one, he must take the other also. No man sure can be so mad, as to think God should work miracles (dis-unite those things which nature hath con-join'd) only that he may sin at ease, have all the bestial pleasures he can project, and none of the consequent smart. We read indeed God divided the sea, but

it was to make *a way for the Ransomed of the Lord to pass over*, Isa. 51. 10. those who were his own people, and went in at his command; but when they were secured, we find the waters immediately return'd to their channel, and over-whelm'd the Egyptians, who ventur'd without the same warrant. And sure the case is alike here, when any man can produce God's mandate for him to run into all excess of riot, to defecrate the Temple of the holy Ghost, *and make his body the member of an harlot*, 1 Cor. 6. 15. in a word, when God bids him do any of those things, which God and good men abhor: then and not before he may hope he may sever such acts from their native penal effects; for till then (how profuse soever some Legendary stories represent him) he will certainly never so bestow his miracles.

12. BUT I fear upon scrutiny there will appear a yet farther circumstance upon which to arraign our mutinies; for tho' it be unreasonable enough to charge God with the ill effects of our own lewdness, yet 'tis a higher step to murmur because we have not materials to be wicked enough. And this I fear is the case with too many of us, who tho' they are not so

so dispoyl'd by their sins, but that they can keep up their round of vicious pleasures, yet are discontented because they think some others have them more exquisite, think their vices are not Gentile enough, unless they be very expensive, and are covetous only that they may be more Luxurious. These are such as St. James speaks of, *who ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts*, James 4. 3. and sure to be mutinous on this account is one of the highest pieces of frenzy. Would any man in his wits tell another he will cut his throat, and then expect he should furnish him with a knife for it? And yet to this amount our murmurs against God, for his not giving us those things wherewith we only design to wage war with him. For surely if the discontents of mankind were closely inspected, I doubt a great many would be found of this kind. It concerns the Reader therefore to make the inquisition in his own breast, both in this and all the former particulars, and I doubt not, if he do it with any ingenuity and uprightness, he will be abundantly convinced, that for his few mites of obedience he pays to God, he receives talents of mercies, (even Temporal)

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ral) from him : and that on the other side, that God as much under-pays his sins, as he over-pays his services: by which God do's sufficiently attest how little he delights in our affliction, how gladly he takes any light occasion of careſſing and cheriſhing, and overſkips thoſe of puniſhing us. Which ſure ought to make us convert all our diſpleaſures againſt our ſins, which extort thoſe acts of ſeverity from him, to which his nature is moſt averſe. And here indeed our reſentments cannot be too ſharp, but towards God our fitteſt addreſs will be in the penitential form of the Prophet Daniel, *O Lord, to us belongeth confuſion of face, but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesſes, tho' we have rebelled againſt him,* Dan. 9. 8, 9. And as his juſtice is to be revered in his afflictions, ſo is his wiſdom alſo, in ſo diſpoſing of events to particular perſons, as may beſt conſiſt with the univerſal Oeconomy and managery of the world, the conſideration whereof is the deſign of the next Section.

SECT.

S E C T. VI.

Of God's General Providence.

1. **W**HEN God made the universe, he intended not only to glorifie himself in one transient act of his power, and then leave this great and wonderful production of his, as the *Ostrich* her eggs in the wilderness, *Lam.* 4. 3. But having drawn it out of it's first Chaos, he secur'd it from returning thither again, by establishing, as a due symmetry of parts, so also a regular order of motion: hence it is that the heavens have their constant revolutions, the earth it's succession of determinate seasons, animals their alternate course of generation and corruption, and by this wise Oeconomy, the world after so many thousand years, seems still in it's spring and first beauty. But it had been in vain to have thus secured the defect of the Creatures, if man, for whose sake they were made, had been excluded from this care. His faculty of reason would

have made him but the more fatal instrument of confusion, and taught him the more compendious ways of disturbing the world. *Job* compares him *to the wild ass's colt*, *Job. 11. 12.* which takes it's range without adverting to any thing of the common good. God has therefore doubly hedged in this unruly Creature, made a fence of laws about him, (both natural and positive) and besides has taken him into the common circle of his Providence, so that he, as well as the rest of the Creation, has his particular station assign'd him; and that not only in reference to other Creatures, but himself; he has put a difference between one man and another, ordained several ranks and classes of men, and endowed them with special and appropriate qualifications for those stations wherein he has set them.

2. THIS, as it is a work of infinite wisdom in God, so it is of unspeakable advantage to men. Without this regular disposition, the world would have been in the same confusion which we read of in the host of the Midianites, *every man's sword against his fellow*, *Judg. 7. 22.* Nothing but force could determine who should do, or enjoy any thing; and even that decision
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also would have been repealable by a greater force: so that we have all reason to confess the utility of that order God has set among men: and even he that bears the lowest and most despicable place in it, is certainly infinitely more happy by contributing to that general Harmony, than he could be in any state of discord.

3. WERE this now well consider'd, methinks it should silence all our complaints, and men should not be so vehemently concern'd in what part of the structure it pleases the great Architect to put them: for every man is to look on himself only as a small parcel of those materials which God is to put into form. Every stone is not fit for the corner, nor every little rafter for the main beam: the wisdom of the Master-builder is alone to determine that. And sure there cannot be a more vile contempt of the divine wisdom than to dispute his choice. Had God wisdom enough to contrive this vast and beautiful fabrick, and may he not be trusted with one of us poor worms? Did he by his *wisdom make the heavens, and by his understanding stretch out the clouds*, Prov. 3. 19. and shall he not know where to place a little lump of figur'd earth? This is certainly

tainly the most absurd distrust imaginable, and yet this is really the true meaning of our repining at the condition he has placed us in.

4. THE truth is, we are so full of our selves, that we can see nothing beyond it: every man expects God should place him where he has a mind to be, tho' by it he discompose the whole scheme of his Providence. But tho' we are so senselessly partial, yet God is not so: he that comprehends at once the whole concern of mankind, applies himself to the accommodating those, not the humoring any particular person. *He has made the great and the small, and careth for all alike,* Wisd.

6. 7. He is the common Father of mankind, and disposes things for the publick advantage of this great family, and 'tis not all the impatient cravings of a froward child, that shall make him recede from his designed method. We are apt enough, I am sure, to tax it not only as a weakness, but injustice too in a Prince, when he indulges any thing to a private favourite to the publick disadvantage; yet so unequal are we that we murmur at God for not doing that, which we murmur at men for doing.

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SECT. VI. *Of God's general Providence.* III

5. BESIDES, a man is to consider, that other men have the same appetites with himself. If he dislike an inferior state why should he not think others do so too? And then as the wise man speaks, *Whose voice shall the Lord hear?* Ecclus. 34. 24. 'Tis sure great insolence in me to expect that God should be more concern'd to humor me, than those multitudes of others who have the same desires. And the more impatient my longings are, the less in reason should be my hopes; for mutiny is no such endearing quality as to render any man a darling to God. But if all men should have equal satisfactions, we should puzzle even Omnipotence it self. Every man would be above and superiour, yet those are comparative terms, and if no man were below, no man could be above. So in wealth, most men desire more, but every man do's at least desire to keep what he has; how then shall one part of the world be supplied without the diminution of the other, unless there should be as miraculous a multiplication of treasure for man's avarice, as there was of loaves for their hunger, *Mat. 16. 9.* It was a good answer which the Ambassadors of an oppressed Province made to *Anthony, If O Emperour,*

perour, thou wilt have double taxes from us, thou must help us to double Springs and Harvests. And sure God must be at the expence of a new Creation, make us a double world, if he should oblige himself to satisfy all the unreasonable appetites of men: and if he satisfy not all, why should any particular person look that his alone should be indulged to?

6. YET as unreasonable as it is, the most of us do betray such a perswasion. No man is discontented that there are lower, as well as higher degrees in the world, that there are poor as well as rich, but all sensible men assent to the fitness of it: yet if themselves happen to be set in the lower form, they exclaim as if the whole order of the world were subverted; which is a palpable indication that they think that Providence which governs others should serve them, and distribute to them not what it, but themselves think good. This immoderate self-love is the spring and root of most of our complaints, makes us such unequal judges in our own concerns, and prompts us to put in *caveats* and exceptions on our own behalf, as *David* did on his sons, *See that thou hurt not the young man Absalom?* 2 Sam. 18. 5.

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As if God were to manage the government of the World with a particular regard to our liking, and were like the Angels at *Sodom*, Gen. 19. 22. *to do nothing till we had got into Zoar*, had all our demands secured to us.

7. I T would indeed astonish a considering man to see, that altho' the concerns of men are all disposed by an unerring Wisdom, and acknowledged by themselves to be so, yet that scarce any man is pleased. The truth is we have generally in us the worser part of the *Levellers* principle, and tho' we can very contentedly behold multitudes below us, yet are impatient to see any above us; not only the *foot* (to use the Apostle's simile) *complains that it is not the hand, but the ear, because it is not the eye*, 1 Cor. 12. 15, 16. Not only the lowermost, but the higher ranks of men are uneasy, if there be any one step above them. Nay so importunate is this aspiring humor, that we see men are forced to feed it, tho' but with air and shadows. He that cannot make any real advance in his quality, will yet do it in Effigies, in all little gaieties and pageantries of it. Every degree in these respects not only emulates, but imitates

it's superior, till at last by that impatience of their proper distance they make it greater, and sink even below their first state by their ridiculous profusion. Indeed the World seems to be so over-run with this vanity, that there is little visible distinction of the degrees, and one had need go to the Herald-office to know mens qualities; for neither their habit nor equipage do now adaies inform us with any certainty.

8. BUT by all this it appears that men look on themselves only as single persons, without reference to the community whereof they are members. For did they consider that, they would endeavor rather to become the places wherein they were set, by doing the duties belonging to them, than be perpetually projecting for a change. A tree that is every year transplanted will never bear fruit, and a mind that is alwaies hurried from it's proper station, will scarce ever do good in any. This is excellently exprest to us by Solomon, *As a bird that wandreth from his nest, so is a man that wandreth from his place*, Prov. 27. 8. 'Tis easy to divine the fate of those young ones from whom the dam wanders, and 'tis as easy to guess how the duties of that place will be performed,

formed, whose owner is alwayes upon the wing, and making towards another. I wish we had not too costly experiments both in Church and State of the truth of this observation. Alas, we forget that we are all servants to the same Master, and that he is to appoint in what office we shall serve him. How should we like in any of our own Families, to have an inferior officer leave his work undone, because he has more mind to be *Major-domo*? Yet this insolence we every day repeat towards God, fullenly dispute his orders, and unless we may chuse our own employments, will do nothing.

9. 'Tis evident, this perverse temper of mankind breeds a great deal of mischief and disturbance in the World, but would breed arrant confusion and subversion, if it were suffered to have it's full range. If God permit but one ambitious spirit to break loose in an Age, as the instrument of his wrath, what destruction does it often times make? How does it *cause the whole earth to tremble, and shake Kingdoms*, as is said of *Nebuchadnezzar*, Isa. 14. 16. and may be said of many others of those whole-sale Robbers who have dignified the trade? But if every aspir-

ing humor should be as prosperous, where would it find fuel to maintain the flame? No doubt every Age produces men of as unbounded desires as *Alexander*, or *Cæsar*, but God gives them not the same opportunities to trouble the world. And accordingly in the more petty ambitions of private men he often orders it so, that those soaring minds can find no benign gale to help their mounting. He that sets bounds to the Sea, saying, *hitherto shalt thou come and no farther, and tho' the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail, tho' they roar, yet can they not pass over*, Jer. 5. 22. does also depress the swelling pride of men, hangs clogs and weights upon them that they cannot rise to their affected height. For tho' we are all willing to forget it, yet God remembers that he is the Rector of the Universe, and will assert his Dominion. The subtlest contrivance cannot circumvent him, the most daring pretender cannot wrest any thing out of his hand, the *Lord will still be King, be the people never so impatient*, Psal. 99. 1. 'Twill therefore sure be as well our prudence as our duty, to *be still, and know that he is God*, Psalm 46. 10. with an humble dereliction of our own wills acquiesce in his,

his, and not by ineffective struglings provoke, whom we are sure never to subdue. We may, like unmanag'd Horses, fume and fret, but still God has the bridle in our jaws, and we cannot advance a step farther than he permits us. Why should we then create torment to our selves by our repinings, which only sets us farther from our aims? 'Tis God's declared method to exalt the lowly, and 'tis observable in the first two Kings of *Israel*, who were of God's immediate election, that he surprized them with that Dignity, when they were about mean and humble employments, the one searching for his Father's Asses, the other keeping his Father's sheep: and would men honestly and diligently exercise themselves in the business of their proper calling, they might perhaps find it a more direct road to advancement, than all the sinister Arts by which ambitious men endeavor to climb. *Solomon* sets it down as an Aphorism, *Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before Kings, he shall not stand before mean men*, Pro. 22. 29. But whether it happen to have that effect or no, it will have a better, for it will sweeten his present condition, divert his mind from mutinous reflections
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on other men's height, and his own lowness; for 'tis commonly men who mind not their work that are at so much leisure to gaze. He that carefully plies his own business, will have his thoughts more centred: and doubtless 'tis no small happiness to have them so; for 'tis their gadding too much abroad, looking on other men's conditions that sends them back (like *Dinah* deflowred) to put all in uproar at home. The son of *Syrach* speaks with transportation of the state even of him that labours and is content, and calls it *a sweet life*, Ecclus. 40. 18. And certainly 'tis infinitely more so than that of the greatest Prince whose mind swells beyond his territories.

10. UPON all these considerations it cannot but appear, very reasonable that we should leave God to govern the world, not be putting in like the sons of *Zebedee*, for the highest seats, but continually rest our selves where he has placed us, till his Providence (not our own designs) advance us. We can no where be so obscure as to be hid from his eyes, who as he valued the Widow's mite above the great oblations of the Rich; so he will no less graciously accept the humble endeavors
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of the mean, than the more eminent services of the Mighty; Himself having declared, That he accepts, *according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not*, 2 Cor. 8. 12. So that in what rank soever a man is set, he has still the opportunity of approving himself to God; and tho' in the eye of the World he be a vessel of dishonor, yet in the day when God comes to *make up his Jewels*, Mal. 3. 17. there will be another estimate made of him who regularly moves in his own sphere. And sure he that sits down in this acquiescence is an happier man, than he that enjoys the greatest worldly splendor: but infinitely more so than he who impatiently covets but cannot attain them; for such a man puts himself upon a perpetual rack, keeps his appetites up at the utmost stretch, and yet has nothing wherewith to satisfy them. Let therefore our ease if not our duty prompt us to acquiescence, and a ready submission to God's disposals, to which we have yet a farther inducement from that distinct care he hath over every man's peculiar, by which he proportions to him, what is really best for him; of which we are farther to consider in the next Section.

S E C T. VII.

Of God's particular Providence.

1. **I**T is the imperfection of our finite nature, that we cannot at once attend to divers things, but the more vehement our intention is upon one, the greater is our neglect of the rest. But God's Infinity cannot be so bounded; his Eyes at once see, and his Providence at once orders all the most distant and disparate things in the World. He is not such an *Epicurean* Deity, as to sequester himself wholly to the enjoyment of his own felicity, and to despise the concerns of poor mortals; but tho' he have his *dwelling so high, yet he humbleth himself to behold the things in heaven and earth*, Psal. 113. 5, 6. Nor does his Providence confine it self to the more splendid and greater parts of managery, the conduct of Empires and States, but it descends to the lowest parts of his Creation, to the *Fowls* of the air, to the *Lilies* of the field, and then

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then sure our Saviour's inference as to mankind is irrefragable, *Are ye not much better than they?* Mat. 6. 26. If a Sparrow (as he elsewhere tells his Disciples) cannot fall to the ground without his particular notice, surely no human creature is less considerable to him; nay if our very hairs are numbred, we cannot think the excrescence is of more value than the stock, but must conclude that God with a particular advertence watches over the concerns of every man.

2. Now God being infinitely good, cannot thus attend us upon any insidious design of doing us mischief: he watches over us as a guardian, not as a spy: and directs his observation to the more seasonable adapting of his benefits. And as he is thus gracious in designing our advantage; so he is no less wise in contriving it. *All things* says the *Wise man*, *are not profitable for all men*, Ecclus. 37. 28. Indeed nothing is absolutely good but God: all created things are good or ill in reference to that to which they are applied. Meat is good, but to a surfeited stomach 'tis not only nauseous but dangerous. Fire is good, but if put in our bosoms, not only burns our clothes but flesh. And as hu-

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man wisdom directs the right application of these and the like, so the supreme and divine ordereth events according to the disposition of the person concern'd; *he knows our frame*, Psalm 103. 14. and discerns what operation such or such things will have upon us, while we who know neither our selves nor them, can make but random guesses, and worse choices. And sure he that does but thus in the general acknowledge God's providence, goodness and wisdom, (which he is no Christian who do's not) has a sufficient amulet against all his sollicitudes, much more his repinings. He cannot think he suffers unawares to him who sees all things. He cannot think his sufferings are design'd for ill to him, because they are dispos'd by him who intends and projects his good. Nor can he fear those intentions can miscarry, which are guided by an infinite and unnerring wisdom, and backt by an uncontrollable power. And sure this is as the Apostle speaks, Heb. 6. 18. *strong consolation*, if we would but duly apply it.

3. YET because general notions do often make but light impressions on us, it may not be amiss to make a little more inspection, and to observe how applicable

plicable they are to the several kinds of our discontents. Now those may be reduced to two: for either we are troubled at the want of something we desire, or at the suffering of something we would avert; so that the two notions of privative and positive, divide between them all our affliction.

4. THE first of these is usually the most comprehensive, for there are few who have not more torment from the apprehension of somewhat they want, than from the smart of any thing they feel. And indeed, whilst our desires are so vagrant and exorbitant, they will be sure to furnish matter enough for our discontents. But certainly there is not in the world such a charm for them, as the consideration that God is more wise to discern, and more careful to provide what is really good for us than we our selves. We poor pur-blind creatures, look only on the surface of things, and if we see a beautiful appearance, somewhat that invites our senses, we court it with the utmost earnestness; but God penetrates deeper, he sees to the bottom both of us and those things we desire, and finds often that tho' they may please our appetite, they will hurt our

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health: and will no more give them to us, than a careful Father will to his child those gilded poisons he cries for. Perhaps this man is taken with the enchanting musick of fame, likes not his own obscure station, but would fain present himself upon a more publick *Theatre*, come into the eye and croud of the world; but how little do's he know how he shall act his part there: whether he shall come off with a *plaudit* or an hiss; He may render himself but the more publick spectacle of scorn; or if he do not that, he may by a better success feed up his vain glory to such a bulk, as may render him too great a weight for that tottering pinnacle whereon he stands: and so after he has made a towering circle, he may fall back with more ignominy to his first point. Another, it may be, no less eagerly desires wealth, thinks (as once *Cræsus* did) that he that abounds in treasure cannot be emty of felicity; but alas, how knows he how he shall employ it? there are two contrary temptations that attend riches; riots, and covetousness: and he is sure a little too confident, that dares promise himself that when there is such odds against him, he shall certainly choose the one just mean;
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and if he do not, he do's only inflame his account at the great Audit. Beside, the more wealth he has, the fairer booty he is to the avarice of others; and it has been often seen, that many a man had not died so poor, if he had lived less rich. Another perhaps thinks not himself so much to want wealth as children to heir it, and complains *with Abraham, Lord what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?* Gen. 15. 2. Yet how knows he whether that child he so much desires, *shall be a wise man or a fool,* Eccles. 2. 19. A comfort or a vexation to himself if he live to see his proof? And if he do not, he do's but project for an access to his dying cares in what hands to leave him. *Rachel* solicited this satisfaction with the greatest impatience, *give me children or I die,* Gen. 30. 1. and 'tis observable that the grant of her wish proved the loss of her life.

5. THUS in these and innumerable other instances we drive on blindfold, and very often impetuously pursue that which would ruine us: and were God as short-sighted as we, into what precipices should we minutely hurry our selves? Or were he so unkind as to consider our importunity more than our interest, we should quickly

quickly sink under the weight of our own wishes; and, as *Juvenal* in his tenth Satyr excellently observes, perish by the success and grant of our Prayers. I suppose there is no man that soberly recollects the events of his life, but can experimentally say, he has sometimes desired things which would have been to his mischief if he had had them, and that himself has after lookt on the denial as a mercy: as on the other side, when he has prosper'd in his aims, and had what his soul lusted after, it has been but like the quails to the *Israelites*, a conviction and punishment, rather than a satisfaction. And now surely God may complain of us as he did of *Israel*, *How long will it be ere you believe me?* Numb. 14. 11. After all the attestation he has given of his care and Providence over us, after all the experiments we have had of the folly of our own elections, we cannot yet be brought either to distrust our selves, or rely upon him. We will still be choosing, and look on him as no farther concern'd than as the executioner of our designs.

6. **T**HIS is certainly a strange perverseness, and such as no sensible man would be guilty of in any other instance. In all
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our secular affairs we trust those whom we have cause to think understand them better than our selves, and rely upon men in their own faculty. We put our estates in the Lawyers hand, our bodies into the Physicians, and submit to their advice tho' it be against our humor, meerly because we account them more competent judges. Yet this deference we cannot be perswaded to pay to God, but will still be prescribing to him, and are very angry if his dispensations do not exactly answer our fancies. And can we offer him a greater affront than thus to distrust him? What is it but interpretatively to deny either his Wisdom, or his Goodness, or both; and so derogate from him in two of his Essential Attributes? For there can be no rational account given by any who believe those, why they should not remit their whole concerns to him. So that the short account is, that in our distrusts we either deny him to be God, or our selves to be men, by resisting the most evident dictates of that reason which distinguishes us from brutes. For certainly there is not in humane discourse a more irrefragable maxim, than that we ought for our own sakes to resign our selves

to him, who, we are infallibly sure, can and will choofe better for us than we for our selves.

7. THIS was fo apparent by meer natural light, that *Socrates* advised men to pray only for bleffings in general, and leave the particular kind of them to God's election, who beft knows what is good for us. And fure this is fuch a piece of Divinity, as extremely reproaches us Chriftians, who cannot match an Heathen in his implicate faith to God. Nay, indeed 'tis the vileft defamation upon God himfelf, that we who pretend to know him more, fould truft him lefs. So that we fee our repinings do not terminate in their own proper guilt, but do in their confequences fwel higher, and our difcontents propagate themfelves into blafphemy. For while we impatiently complain of our wants, we do tacitly tax God to want either that wifdom, power, or love, whereby he fould fupply us. And fure he muft be very Atheiftical to whom this will not give a competent prejudice againft this fin.

8. AND this very confideration will equally prejudge the other branch of our difcontents, I mean thofe which repine
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at the ills we suffer. And not only our privative, but our positive afflictions may by it have their bitterness taken off: for the same goodness and wisdom which denies those things we like, because they are hurtful for us, do's upon the very same reason give us those distastful things which he sees profitable. A wise Physician do's not only diet, but, if occasion be, purge his patient also. And surely there is not such a purifier, such a cleanser of the soul as are afflictions, if we do not (like disorderly patients) frustrate their efficacy by the irregular managery of our selves under them.

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SECT. VIII.

Of the Advantage of Afflictions.

I. **I**T were the work of a Volume to give an exact and minute account of the benefit of Afflictions. I shall only point at some of the more general and obvious. And first it is one of the most awakening calls to repentance; and to this end it is that God most usually designs it. We see the whole scene of it, *Hos. 5. 15. I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early:* and in the very next verse we find this voice of God echoed forth by a penitential note, *Come and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten and he will bind us up.* Thus we find the Brethren of *Joseph*, tho there had a long interval passed betwixt their barbarous usage of him, and his feigned rigor to them, yet when they saw themselves distress'd by the one, then they began to recollect the other,

other, saying, *We are verily guilty concerning our brother*, Gen. 42. 21. Prosperity is an intoxicating thing, and there are few brains strong enough to bear it; it laies us asleep, and amuses us with pleasant dreams, whilst in the mean time *Satan* rifles our treasure, and spoils us by the deceitful charmes of sin, of our innocency and real happiness. And can there be a more friendly office done for a man in this condition, than to rouse him, and bring him to apprehend the designs that are laid against him? And this is the errand on which afflictions are sent: so that we have reason to look on them as our friends and confederates that intend our rescue, and to take the alarm they give us, and diligently seek out those intestine enemies of which they warn us. And he that instead of this quarrels at their interposing, thinks them his *enemies because they tell him the truth*, Gal. 4. 16. do's miserably pervert *the counsel of God against himself*, Luke 7. 30. and may at last verify his own jealousies; and by so provoking an ingratitude, convert those into the wounds of an enemy, which were originally meant as the corrections of a Father.

2. AND as afflictions do thus in general admonish us of sins, so it pleases God most frequently so to model and frame them that they bear the very image and impress of those particular guilts they are to chastise, and are the dark shadows that attend our gay delights, or flagrant insolencies. The wise man observes, that the turning the *Egyptian* waters into blood was a manifest reproof of that cruel commandment for the murdering of the Hebrew infants, *Wisd.* 12. 5. And surely we might in most, if not all our sufferings, see some such corresponding circumstances, as may lead us to the immediate provoking cause of it. God who do's all things in number, weight, and measure, do's in punishments also observe a symmetry and proportion, and adapts them not only to the heinousness, but even the very specific kind of our crimes. The only fixt immutable rule he has given for his Vice-gerents on earth to punish by, is that in the case of murder, which is we see grounded on this rule of proportion, *He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*, Gen. 9. 6. And tho' he have now rescinded the inferior retaliations of the eye for the eye, the tooth
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for the tooth, Exod. 21. 24. (probably for the hardness of our hearts, because he saw our revengeful natures would be too much pleased with it) yet he has not precluded himself from acting by those measures, but we see he do's very often signally make men feel the smart of those violences or injustices they have used to others. Of this the sacred story affords several examples (as *Adonibezek*, Judg. 1. 6. and *Ahab*, 1 Kings 21. 19. and profane many more, and dayly experience and observation most of all. And tho' this method of retaliations is not alwayes so evident and apparent to the world, because men's sins are not alwayes so; yet I believe if men would duly recollect, it would be for the most part discernable to their own consciences, and they would apparently see, that their calamities did but trace the footsteps of their sins.

3. Now if we rightly weigh this, we cannot but think it a very advantageous circumstance. We are naturally blind when we look inward, and if we have not some adventitious light to clear the object, will be very apt to overlook it. Therefore since the end of all our afflictions is our repentance, it is a wise and gracious disposal,

posel, that they do thus point to us those particular sins of which we are to repent. The body of sin will not be destroyed in the whole entire bulk, but must be dismembred, pull'd in pieces limb by limb. He that attaques it otherwise, will be like *Sertorius's* soldier, who ineffectively tugg'd at the Horse's tail to get it off at once, when he that pull'd it hair by hair, quickly did it. Therefore as it is a great part of our spiritual Wisdom to know in what especial parts the *Sampson*-like strength of our corruptions lies, so it is a great instance of God's care of us, thus by his corrections to discipline and instruct us in it.

4. IN all our afflictions therefore it is our concern, nicely and critically to observe them. I mean not to enhance our murmurs and complaints, but to learn by them what is God's peculiar controversy against us. This is indeed *to hear the rod, and who hath appointed it*, Mich. 6. 9. Let him therefore that suffers in any of his concerns, examine whether he have not some corresponding guilt which answers to it, *as face answers face*, Prov. 27. 19. He that is impoverished in his estate, let him consider first how he acquired it, whether there were not something of fraud

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or injustice, which like a cancrus humor, mixt in it's very elements and constitution, and eat out it's bowels: or whether some sacrilegious prize, some coal from the altar have not fired his nest. Or if nothing can be charged upon the acquett, let him consider how he has used it; whether he have not made it the fuel of his lusts, in riot and excesses, or the object of his adoration in an inordinate value of it. In like manner he who is afflicted in his body, groans under the torment of some grievous disease, may very seasonably interrogate himself, whether it have not been contracted by his vice, whether *his bones be not* (in a more literal sense than *Job* meant it) *full of the sins of his youth*, *Job* 20. 11. and surfeiting and drunkenness be not the cause, *that his soul*, as the Psalmist speaks, *abhors all manner of meat, and is even hard at death's door*, *Psal.* 107. 18. or at least whether the not employing his health and strength to those purposes for which 'twas given, is not the reason of it's being withdrawn. He also that is invaded in his reputation, that lies under some great infamy, is to consider whether it be not deserved; whether some part if not the whole guilt of which he

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is accused, stick not to him : or if he be clear in that particular instance, whether some concealed sin of his would not if it were known, incur as great scandal : for in that case he has in right forfeited his reputation, and God may make the seizure as well by an unjust, as a just accusation. Or if his heart accuse him not here, yet let him farther reflect, whether his vain-glorious pursuits of praise and high conceits of himself, have not made this an apt and necessary humiliation for him. Or lastly let him recollect how he has behaved himself towards others in this kind : whether he have had a just tenderness of his neighbours fame, or have not rather exposed and prostituted it. In these and many other instances such a particular scrutiny would (in all probability) discover the affinity and cognation betwixt our guilts and our punishments, and by marking out the spring and fountain head, direct us how to stop or divert the current. And he that would diligently employ himself in this inquisition, would find little leasure and less cause to condole his afflictions, but would divert his complaints upon himself, *accept of the punishment of his iniquity,*
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and thank the Lord for thus giving him warning, Psal. 16. 8.

5. A second benefit which God designs us in our afflictions, is the weaning us from the world, to disentangle us from it's fetters and charms, and draw us to himself. We read in the story of the *Deluge*, that so long as the Earth was covered with Waters, the very *Raven* was contented to take shelter in the Ark, but when all was fair and dry, even the *Dove* finally forsook it, *Gen.* 8. 12. And 'tis much so with us: the worst of men will commonly in distresses have recourse to God, (the very Heathen Mariners in a storm could rebuke *Jonah* for not calling upon his God, *Jon.* 1. 6.) when yet the very best of us are apt to forget him amidst the blandishments and insinuations of prosperity. The kind aspects of the World are very enchanting, apt to inveigle and besot us; and therefore it is God's care over us, to let us sometimes see her more averting countenance in her frowns and storms; that, as Children, frightened by some ugly appearance, we may run into the arms of our Father. Alas, were all things exactly fitted to our humors here, when should we think of a

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remove? And had not Death some harbingers to prepare us for him, what a surprising guest would he be to us? 'Tis storied of *Antigonus*, that seeing a Souldier in his Camp of so daring a courage, that he always courted the most hazardous attempts, and observing him also of a very infirm sickly habit, he took a particular care of him, and by Medicines and good attendance recovered him; which no sooner he had done, but the man grew more cautious, and would no longer expose himself as formerly; and gave this reason for it, that now he was healthy his life was of some value to him, and not to be hazarded at the same rate, as when it was only a burden: and should God cure all our complaints, render us perfectly at ease, I fear too many of us would be of the Souldier's mind, think our lives too good to resign to him, much more to hazard for him, as our Christianity in many cases obliges us. The son of *Syrach* observes, how *dreadful death is to a man that is at rest in his possessions, that hath abundance of all things, and hath nothing to vex him*, nay, he descends much lower, and puts in him *who is yet able to receive meat*, *Ecclus.* 41. 1. The truth is, we do so passionately dote

dote upon the world, that like besotted lovers, we can bear a great deal of ill usage, before we quitt our pursuit. Any little slight favour atones us after multiplied affronts, and we must be disciplined by repeated disappointments, e're we can withdraw our confidence. But how fatally secure should we be, if God should permit this *Siren* always to entertain us with her musick, and should not by some discordant grating notes, interrupt our raptures, and recall us to sober thoughts?

6. INDEED 'tis one of the highest instances of God's love, and of his clemency also, thus to project our reducement. We were all in our Baptism affianced to him, with a particular abrenunciation of the world, so that we cannot without the greatest disloyalty cast our selves into it's embraces; and yet when we have thus broken *the covenant of our God*, Prov. 2. 17. He do's not pursue us with a jealous rage, with the severity which an abused rivall'd kindness would suggest; doth not give us a bill of divorce and disclaim his relation; but contrives how he may reclaim and bring us back to himself. The transcendency of this lenity God excellently describes by the Prophet in the case of *Israel*,

*They say, if a man put away his wife, and she become another man's : shall he return unto her again ? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers, yet return unto me saith the Lord, Jer. 3. 1. And this, tho' a great height of indulgence, is no more than he dayly repeats to us. After we have basely adulterated with the World, converted our affections from God to it, he do's not give us over, abandon us to our lewd course, and consequent ruine; but still invites our return: and lest that may not serve, he do's with a great deal of holy artifice, essay to break that accursed league into which we are enter'd, pulls off the disguise in which the world courted us, and makes us see it as it is in it self, a scene of *vanity and vexation of spirit*, Eccles. 1. 14.*

7. AND as he do's this in general, so also with a particular application to those temporal satisfactions wherewith we were most transported. The things to which we are more indifferent, do not so much endanger us; 'tis those upon which we have more vehemently set our hearts, which become our share, and awake his jealousy; and accordingly we frequently see, that 'tis in those he chooses to cross us. How often

often do's it happen that those which are enamored of themselves, dote upon their own features, do meet with some disease or accident which blasts their beauty, withers that fair Flower, and makes their Winter overtake their Spring? So in our Friends and Relations, 'tis usually seen, we soonest loose those for whom we have the greatest, the most immoderate passion. If there be one fondling among our Children, 'tis odds but that is taken away, or made as much the object of our grief and sorrow, as ever it was of our joy and love. When God sees our hearts so excessively cleave to any transitory thing, he knows 'tis necessary to sever them, for whilst we have such clogs upon us, *our souls will cleave to the dust*, Psalm 119. 25. Will not be able to soar up to the higher Region for which they are design'd.

8. IN a word, God so loves us, that he removes whatever he sees will obstruct that intimate union which he desires with us; and sure this is so obliging, that tho' he should bid us to our loss, tho' he could not recompence us for what he takes from us, yet we must be very ill natur'd if we can be angry at so much kindness. But
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when to this is added, that all this is principally, nay, solely design'd for our advantage, that God takes from us all these empty delusory contentments, meerly that he may instate us in solid and durable joys ; we betray as much ignorance of our interest, as insensibleness of our obligation, if we repine that God makes us so much his care. 'Tis true indeed, the things to which we have so inordinately adhered, do stick so close, that they cannot be pull'd away without some pain: yet for our Corporal security we can endure the sundring of parts that do not only cleave but grow to us. He that has a gangren'd member, suffers it to be cut off to save his whole body, and do's not revile, but thank and reward the Chirurgion. Yet where our souls are concern'd, and where the things have no native union with us, but are only cemented by our passions, we are impatient of the method, and think God deals very hardly with us, not to let us perish with what we love. The sum of all is this: God tho' he be abundantly condescending, yet he will never stoop so low as to share his interest in us with the world: if we will devote our selves to it, 'tis not all our empty forms of service will satisfie him,

him, if we cannot divorce our hearts from it, he will divorce himself eternally from us. And the case being thus, we are sure very ill advised if we do not contentedly resign our selves to his methods, and cheerfully endure them how sharp soever. The only expedient we have for our own ease, is to shorten the cure, by giving our assistance, and not by strugglings to render it more difficult and painful. Let us entirely surrender our wills to him, and when we have done that, we may without much pain let him take any thing else. But the more difficult we find it to be disentangled from the world, the greater should our caution be against all future engagements to it. If our escape hath been as the Apostle says, *so as by fire*, 1 Cor. 3. 15. with much smart and hazard, let us at least have so much wit, as the common proverb allows children, and not again expose our selves: let us never glue our hearts to any external thing, but let all the concerns of the world hang loose about us: by that means we shall be able to put them off insensibly when ever God calls for them, or perhaps we shall prevent his calling for them at all, it being for the most part our too close adhesion to them which prompts him to it.

9. A third advantage of afflictions is, that it is a mark and signature of our adoption, a witness of our legitimation. *What son is he* (saith the Apostle) *whom the Father chastiseth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons,* Heb. 12. 7, 8. Jacob clad his darling *Joseph* in a party-coloured Coat, and God's favorites do here wear a Livery inter-woven with a mixture of dark and gloomy colours; their *long white robes* are laid up for them against they come to the *marriage of the Lamb*, Rev. 19. 7. Indeed, we much mistake the design of Christianity, if we think it calls us to a condition of ease and security. It might suit well enough with the Votaries of the Golden Calf, to *sit down to eat and to drink, and rise up to play*, Exod. 32. 6. But the disciples of the crucified Saviour are trained to another discipline, our profession enters us into a state of warfare, and accordingly our very Baptismal engagement runs all in military terms, and we are not only Servants of Christ's Family, but Soldiers of his Camp. Now we know in a War men must not expect to pass their time in ease and softness, but besides all the dangers and difficulties

difficulties of the combat, have many other hardships to endure; hunger and thirst, heat and cold, hard lodgings and weary marches: and he that is too nice for those, will not long stick to his colours. And it is the same in our spiritual warfare: many pressures and sufferings are annexed to it, and our passive valour is no less tried than our active. In respect of this it is that our Savior admonishes his Profelytes to compute first the difficulties incident to their profession, and that he may not ensnare us by proposing too easy terms, he bids us reckon upon the worst, and tells us, that he *that forsakes not all that he hath, shall not be his disciple*, Luke 14. 33. *and that we must thro' much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God*, Acts 14. 22. Indeed, 'twere very absurd for us to expect easier conditions, when these are the same to which our Leader has submitted. *The Captain of our Salvation was perfected by sufferings*, Heb. 2. 10. *and if it behoved Christ to suffer before he enter'd into his glory*, Luke 24. 46. it were insolent madness for us to look to be carried thither upon our beds of Ivory, or from the noise of our Harps and Viols, be immediately rapt into the Choir of Angels.

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10. THIS has been so much consider'd by pious men, that they have lookt upon their secular prosperities with fear and jealousy, and many have solemnly petition'd for crosses, as thinking them the necessary attestation of their son-ship, and means of assimilation to their elder brother. Why then should that which was so desirable to them, appear so formidable to us? or why should we so vehemently deprecate, what they so earnestly invited? If we indeed think it a privilege to be the sons of God, and fellow-heirs with Christ, why do we grudge at the condition? The Roman Captain tells St. *Paul* that he obtained the immunities of a Roman *with a great sum*, Acts 22. 28. and shall we expect so much a nobler and more advantageous adoption perfectly *gratis*; look that God should change his whole Oeconomy for our ease, give us an Eternal Inheritance, discharged of those Temporal Incumbrances himself has annexed to it? This were sure as unjust a hope, as it would be a vain one. When *David* had that ensnaring proposal made him, of being the King's son in Law, 1 Sam. 18. 21. &c. he set such a value upon the dignity, that he despised the difficulty of the condition: and

sure we must have very low abject souls, if when so infinitely an higher advancement is sincerely offer'd us, we can suffer any apprehension of hardship to divert us. In a word, let us remember that of the Apostle, *If we suffer, we shall also reign with him,* 2 Tim. 2. 12. And tho' our afflictions be in themselves not joyous but grievous, yet when they are consider'd as the earnest of our future inheritance, they put on another face, and may rather enamour than fright us.

11. A fourth advantage of afflictions is, that they excite our compassions towards others: there is nothing qualifies us so rightly to estimate the sufferings of others, as the having our selves felt them: without this our apprehensions of them are as dull and confused, as a blind man's of colours, or a deaf man's of sounds. They *that stretch themselves upon their couches, that eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall: that chaunt to the sound of the viol, drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, will not be much grieved with the afflictions of Joseph,* Amos 6. 4, 5. Nay so necessary is our experience towards our commiseration, that we see 'twas thought a requisite

accomplishment of our high Priest (that highest example of unbounded compassion) and therefore saith the Apostle, *It behoved him in all things to be made like his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful high Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people: for in that he himself hath suffer'd being tempted, he is able also to succor them that are tempted,* Heb. 2. 17, 18.

But if he whose mere sense of our miseries brought him down to us, chose this expedient to advance his pity, how necessary is it to our petrified bowels? And since God has assign'd our mercies to our Brethren, as the standard by which he will proportion his to us, 'tis more ours than their advantage to have them enlarged: so that when by making us taste of their cup, acquainting us with the bitter relish of their sufferings, he prepares us to a Christian sympathy with them, 'tis but a remoter way of obliging and qualifying us for a more ample portion of his mercy. Nay besides the profit, there is honour accrues to us by it. Compassion is one of the best properties of our nature, and we unman our selves when we put it off; nay more, 'tis an attribute of the Divinity,

vinity, and the more we advance in it, the closer approaches we make to him. And therefore we have all reason to bless him for that discipline by which he promotes us in so excellent, so necessary a grace.

12. A fifth benefit of affliction, is, that it is an improvement of Devotion, sets us with more heartiness to our Prayers. Whilest Prosperity flows in upon us, we bathe our selves in it's streams, but are very apt to forget it's source; so that God is fain to stop the current, leave us dry and parched, that our needs may make us do what our gratitude would not, trace our blessings up to the original spring, and both acknowledge and invoke him as the Author of all our good. This effect of afflictions is observ'd by the Prophet, *Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them,* Isa. 26. 16. And I believe I may appeal to every man's experience, whether his Prayers be not more frequent and more hearty too, when he is under some distress. Then how importunate are we in our petitions? how profuse in our Vows and Promises? saying with *Israel,* *Deliver us only we pray thee this day: and they put away the strange Gods from among them,* and

and served the Lord, Judg. 10. 15, 16. I confess 'tis no good indication of our temper, that we need thus to be put in the press ere we will yield any thing. Yet since we are so disingenuous, 'tis a mercy in God to adapt his methods to us, to extort when we will not give; and if he can have no free-will-offerings, yet at least to exact his tribute. Nor do's he design the effect of this should cease with the calamity that rais'd it, but expects our compell'd addresses should bring us into the way of voluntary ones, and happily ensnare us into Piety. And indeed herein we are worse than brutish if it do not. We think it a barbarous rudeness to engage a man in our affairs, and as soon as we have served our own turns, never take farther notice of him. Nay indeed the very beasts may lecture us in this piece of Morality, many of them paying a signal gratitude where they have received benefits: and shall we not come up at least to their pitch? Shall not the endearment of our deliverance bring our deliverer into some repute and consideration with us, and make us desire to keep up an acquaintance and intercourse with him? Yet if ingenuity work not with us, let interest at least prevail,

vail, and the remembrance how soon we may need him again, admonish us not to make our selves strangers to him. God complains of *Israel*, *Wherefore say my people, we are lords? we will come no more unto thee*, Jer. 2. 31. A very insolent folly to renounce that dependance by which alone they subsisted, and no less will it be in any of us if we stop our recourse to him because we have had advantage by it. We have no assurance that the same occasion shall not recur, but with what face can we then resume that intercourse which in the interval we despised? So that if we have but any ordinary Providence, we shall still so celebrate past rescues, as to continue in a capacity of begging more, and then we cannot but also confess the benefit of those first calamities which inspirited our devotion, and taught us to pray in earnest, and will be ashamed that our Thanks should be utter'd in a fainter accent than our petitions; or our daily Spiritual Concerns should be more coldly solicited than our Temporal accidental ones.

13. NOR is it only our devotion that is thus improved by our distresses, but many other Graces; our Faith, our Hope, our
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Patience, our Christian Sufferance and Fortitude. It is no Triumph of Faith to trust God for those good things which he gives us in hand; this is rather to walk by sense than Faith: but to rely on him in the greatest destitution, *and against hope to believe in hope*, this is the Faith of a true child of *Abraham*, and will be *imputed* to us (as it was to him) *for righteousness*, Rom. 4. 23. So also our Patience owes all its opportunities of exercise to our Afflictions, and consequently owes also a great part of its being to them, for we know desuetude will loose habits. What imaginable use is there of Patience, where there is nothing to suffer? In our prosperous state, we may indeed employ our Temperance, our Humility, our Caution; but Patience seems then an useless Vertue: nay indeed, for ought we know, may be counterfeit, till adversity bring it to the test. And yet this is the most glorious accomplishment of a Christian, that which most eminently conforms him to the Image of his Saviour, whose whole life was a perpetual exercise of this grace; and therefore we love our ease too well if we are unwilling to buy this Pearl at any price.

14. LASTLY our thankfulness is (at least ought to be) increas'd by our distresses. 'Tis very natural for us to reflect with value and esteem upon those blessings we have lost, and we too often do it to aggravate our discontent: but sure the more rational use of it is to raise our thankfulness for the time wherein we enjoyed them. Nay not only our former enjoyments, but even our present deprivations deserve our gratitude, if we consider the happy advantages we may reap from them. If we will perversely cast them away, that unworthy contempt payes no scores, for we still stand answerable in God's account for the good he design'd and we might have had by it, and we become liable to a new charge for our ingratitude in thus *despising the chastisement of the Lord*, Heb. 12. 5.

15. AND now if all these benefits of afflictions (which are yet but imperfectly recited) may be thought worth considering, it cannot but reconcile us to the sharpest of God's methods; unless we will own our selves such mere animals, as to have no other apprehensions than what our bodily senses convey to us; for sure he that has reason enough to under-

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stand that he has an immortal soul, cannot but assent that it's interests should be served, tho' with the displacency of his flesh. Yet even in regard of that, our murmurings are oft very unjust, for we do many times ignorantly prejudge God's designs towards us even in temporals, who frequently makes a little transient uneasiness the passage to secular felicities. *Moses* when he fled out of *Egypt*, probably little thought that he should return thither a *God unto Pharaoh*, *Exod. 4. 16.* and as little did *Joseph* when he was brought thither a slave, that he was to be a ruler there: yet as distant as those states were, the divine providence had so connected them, that the one depended upon the other. And certainly we may often observe the like over-ruling hand in our own distresses, that those events which we have entertain'd with the greatest regret, have in the consequences been very beneficial to us.

16. To conclude, we have certainly both from speculation and experience abundant matter to calm all our disquiets, to satisfy our distrusts, and to fix in us an entire resignation to God's disposals, who has designs which we cannot penetrate,

but none which we need fear, unless we our selves pervert them. We have our Savior's word for it, that *he will not give us a stone when we ask bread, nor a scorpion when we ask a fish*, Mat. 7. 9. Nay his love secures us yet farther from the errors of our own wild choice, and do's not give us those stones and scorpions which we importune for. Let us then leave our concerns to him who best knows them, and make it our sole care to entertain his dispensations with as much submission and duty, as he dispenses them with love and wisdom. And if we can but do so, we may dare all the power of earth and hell too, to make us miserable: for be our afflictions what they can, we are sure they are but what we in some respect or other need; be they privative or positive, the want of what we wish, or the suffering of what we wish not, they are the disposals of him who cannot err, and we shall finally have cause to say with the Psalmist, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted*, Psal. 119. 71.

S E C T. IX.

*Of our Misfortunes compared
with other men's.*

1. **W**E come now to impress an equally just and useful consideration, the comparing our misfortunes with those of other men's: and he that do's that, will certainly see so little cause to think himself singular, that he will not find himself superlative in calamity; for there is no man living that can with reason affirm himself to be the very unhappiest man, there being innumerable distresses of others which he knows not of, and consequently cannot bring them in ballance with his own. A multitude of men there are whose persons he knows not, and even of those he do's, he may be much a stranger to their distresses; many sorrows may lie at the heart of him who carries a smiling face, and many a man has been an object of envy to those who look but on the surface of his state, who yet to those who know his private griefs appears more worthy of compassion. And sure this confused
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uncertain estimate of other men's afflictions, may divert us from all loud out-cries of our own. *Solon* seeing a friend much oppress'd with grief, carried him up to a town that over-lookt the city of *Athens*, and shewing him all the buildings, said to him, Consider how many sorrows have, do, and shall in future Ages inhabit under all those roofs, and do not vex thy self with those inconveniencies which are common to mortality, as if they were only yours. And sure 'twas good advice: for suffering is almost as inseparable an adjunct of our nature, as dying is: yet we do not see men very apt to imbitter their whole lives by the fore sight that they must die, but seeing it a thing as universal as inevitable, they are more forward to take up the *Epicure's* resolution, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we die*, 1 Cor. 15. 32. And why should we not look upon afflictions also as the common lot of humanity, and as we take the advantages, so be content to bear the incumbrances of that state?

2. BUT besides that implicate allowance that is thus to be made for the unknown calamities of others, if we survey but those that lie open and visible to us, the most of us shall find enough to discountenance

countenance our complaints. Who is there that when he has most studiously recollected his miseries, may not find some or other that apparently equals, if not exceeds him? He that stomachs his own being contemned and slighted, may see another persecuted and oppressed. He that groans under some sharp pain, may see another afflicted with sharper: and even he that has the most acute torments in his body, may see another more sadly cruciated by the agonies of his mind. So that if we would but look about us, we should see so many forreign occasions of our pity, that we should be ashamed to confine it wholly to our selves.

3. It will perhaps be said that this cannot be universally true, for that there must in comparative degrees be some lowest state of misery: I grant it, but still that state consists not in such an indivisible point, that any one person can have the inclosure; or if it do's, twill be so hard for any to discern who that one person is, that I need desire no fairer a composition, than to have every man suspend his repinings, till he can evince his title. But alas! there are but few that can make any approaches to such a pretence: for tho' if we
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advert to men's complaints, we should think all degrees of comparison were confounded, and every man were equally the greatest sufferer; yet certainly in the truth of things 'tis nothing so; for (not to repeat what was before mention'd, that probably no man is miserable in any proportion to the utmost degree of possibility) the remarkably unhappy are very far the less number. And how passionately soever men exaggerate their calamities, yet perhaps in their sober mood, they will scarce change states with those whom they profess to think more happy than themselves. It was the saying of *Socrates*, that if there were a common bank made of all men's troubles, most men would rather chuse to take those they brought, than to venture upon a new dividend. And indeed he had reason for his supposition; for considering how great a part of many men's afflictions are of their own making, fictitious and imaginary, they may justly fear least they should exchange feathers for lead, their own empty shadows for the real and pressing calamities of others, and cannot but think it best to sit down with their own, which serve their declamations as well, and their ease much better. We oft see

see men at a little mis-shaping of a garment, a scarce discernable error in their cook, or their shortest interruption in their sports, in such transports of trouble, as if they were the most unfortunate men in the world; yet for all that you shall hardly persuade them to change with him whose coarse cloathing supersedes all care of the fashion, whose appetite was never disappointed for want of sawce, and whose perpetual toil makes him insensible what the defeat of sport signifies,

4. **NAY** even where the exchange seems more equal, where the afflictions are on both sides solid and substantial, yet a prudent man would scarce venture upon the barter. 'Tis no small advantage to know what we have to contest with, to have experimented the worst of it's attacks, by which we become better able to guard our selves: but a new evil comes with the force of a surprise, and finds us open and disarmed. It is indeed almost a miraculous power that custom has in reconciling us to things otherwise displeasing; all our senses are taught to remit of their aversion by familiarity with ungrateful objects: that ugly form which at first makes us start, by use divests it's
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terror, and we reconcile our selves to harsh sounds and ill relishes by long custom. And sure it has the very same effect upon our minds, the most fierce calamities do by acquaintance grow more tractable; so that he that exchanges an old one for a new, do's but bring a wild Lion into his house instead of a tame: it may for ought he knows immediately tear him in pieces, but at least must cost him a great deal of pains to render it gentle and familiar, and certainly no wise man would wish to make such a bargain.

5. BY all this it appears, that how extravagantly soever we aggravate our own calamities and extenuate other men's, we dare not upon recollection stand to our own estimate, and what can be said more in prejudice of our discontents? 'Tis a granted maxim that every man must have afflictions, *man that is born of a woman, says Job, is of few years, and full of trouble, Job 14. 1.* and we must reverse God's fundamental law, before we can hope for a total exemption. All that any man can aspire to, is to have but an equal share with others, and the generality of men have so, at least none can prove he has not so; and till he can, his murmurs will sure be

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very unjustifiable, especially when they have this convincing circumstance against them, that he dares not upon sober thoughts change his afflictions with most of his neighbours. He is an ill member of a community, who in publick assessments would shuffle off all payments: and he is no better, who in this common tax God has laid upon our nature, is not content to bear his share.

6. AND truly would we but consider, that in all our sufferings nothing befalls us but what is common to our kind, nay which is extremely exceeded by many within the verge of our own observation, we must be senselessly partial to be impatient. The Apostle thought it a competent consolation for the first Christians, that *there had no temptation befallen them, but what was common to men*, 1 Cor. 10. 13. and we betray very extravagant opinions of our selves if it be not so to us. Indeed, 'twere scarce possible for us to be so unsatisfied, as the greatest part of us are, did we in the comparing our selves with others, proceed with any tolerable ingenuity.

7. BUT alas, we are very fallacious and deceitful in the point, we do not compare

pare the good of others with our good, nor their evil with our evil; but with an envious curiosity we amass together all the desirable circumstances of our neighbours condition, and with as prying discontent, we ransack all our grievances, and confront to them. This is so insincere a way of proceeding, as the most ordinary understanding can detect. If I should wager that my arm were longer than another man's, and for tryal measure my arm with his finger, he must be stupidly silly, that should award for me; and yet this were not a grosser cheat, than that which we put upon our selves, in our comparisons with others. And 'tis a little strange to observe, unto what various purposes we can apply this one thin piece of Sophistry: for when we compare our neighbours and our selves in point of morality, we do but reverse the fallacy, and presently make his vices as much exceed ours, as our calamities did his in the other instance. They are indeed both great violences to reason and justice, yet the latter is sure the pleasanter kind of deceit. A man has some joy in thinking himself less wicked than his neighbour, but what imaginable comfort can he take in think-

ing himself more miserable? Certainly he that would submit to a couſenage, had much better ſhift the ſcene, and think his ſufferings leſs than they are, rather than more; for ſince opinion is the thing that uſually ſets an edge upon our calamities, it might be a profitable deceit that could ſteal that from us.

8. BUT we need not blindfold our ſelves if we would but uſe our eyes aright, and ſee things in their true ſhapes; and if we did thus, what a ſtrange turn would there be in the common eſtimates of the world? How many of the gilded troubles of greatneſs, which men at a diſtance look on with ſo much admiration and deſire, would then be as much contemned as now they are courted? A competency would then get the better of abundance, and the now envied pomp of Princes, when balanced with the cares and hazards annexed, would be ſo far from a bait, that men like *Saul*, 1 Sam. 10. 22. would *hide themſelves* from the preferment; and he that underſtood the weight, would rather chooſe to wield a Flail than a Sceptre: yet ſo childiſhly are we beſotted with the glittering appearance of things, that we conclude, felicity muſt needs dwell where
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there is a magnificent Portico, and being possess'd with this fancy, we over-look her in our own humbler Cottages, where she would more constantly reside, if she could but find us at home: but we are commonly engag'd in a rambling pursuit of her where she is seldomest to be found, and in the *interim* miss of her at her own doors.

9. INDEED there is scarce a greater folly or unhappiness incident to man's nature, than this fond admiration of other men's enjoyments, and contempt of our own. And whilst we have that humour, it will supplant not only our present, but all possibilities of our future content: for tho' we could draw to our selves all those things for which we envy others, we should have no sooner made them our own, than they would grow despicable and nauseous to us. This is a speculation which has been attested by innumerable experiments, there being nothing more frequent, than to see men with impatient eagerness, nay, often with extreme hazards, pursue those acquisitions, which, when they have them, they are immediately sick of. There is scarce any man that may not give himself instances of this in his own particular: and yet so fatally stupid are we, that no de-
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feats will discipline us or take us off from these false estimates of other men's happinesses. And truly while we state our comparisons so unequally, they are as mischievous, as the common proverb speaks them odious: but if we would begin at the right end, and look with as much compassion on the adversities of our brethren, as we do with envy on their prosperities, every man would find cause to sit down contentedly with his own burden, and confess that he bears but the proportionable share of his common nature, unless perhaps it be where some extraordinary demerits of his own have added to the weight, and in that case he has more reason to admire his afflictions are so few, than so many. And certainly, every man knows so many more ills by himself, than it is possible for him to do by another, that he that really sees himself exceed others in his sufferings, will find cause enough to think he do's in sins also.

10. BUT if we stretch the comparison beyond our contemporaries, and look back to the generations of old, we shall have yet farther cause to acknowledge God's great indulgence to us. *Abraham* tho' the friend of God, was not exempted from severe

vere trials; he was first made to wander from his Country, and betake himself to a kind of vagrant life, was a long time suspended from the blessing of his desired off-spring, and when at last his beloved *Isaac* was obtain'd, it caus'd a domestick jarr, which he was fain to compose by the expulsion of *Isbmael*, tho' his son also. But what a contest may we think there was in his own bowels, when that rigorous task was impos'd on him of sacrificing his *Isaac*? and tho' his faith gloriously triumph'd over it, yet sure there could not be a greater pressure upon humane nature. *David*, the man after God's own heart, is no less signal for his afflictions than for his piety; he was for a great while an exile from his Country, and (which he most bewailed) from the Sanctuary, by the persecutions of *Saul*: and after he was settled in that throne to which God's immediate assignation had intitled him, what a succession of calamities had he in his own family? The incestuous rape of his Daughter, the retaliation of that by the as unnatural murder of *Amnon*, and that seconded by another no less barbarous conspiracy of *Absolom* against himself, his expulsion from *Jerusalem*, the base revilings of *Shimei*,
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and finally the loss of that darling son in the act of his sin. A cluster of afflictions in comparison whereof the most of ours are but like the gleanings (as the Prophet speaks) *after the vintage is done.* It were indeed endless to instance in all the several fore-fathers of our Faith before *Christ's* Incarnation, the Apostle gives us a brief, but a very comprehensive compendium of their sufferings, *They had trial of cruel mockings, and scourgings; yea moreover, of bonds and imprisonments: they were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented: they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth,* Hebr. 11. 36, 37, 38. And if we look on the primitive Christians, we shall see them, perfectly the counterpart to them, their privileges consisted not in any immunities from calamities; for their whole lives were scenes of sufferings. St. Paul gives us an account of his own, *in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft: of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned,*

stoned, thrice I suffer'd shipwrack, a night and a day have I been in the deep, in journeying often, &c. 2 Cor. 11. 23, &c. and if his single hardships rose thus high, what may we think the whole sum of all his fellow-labourers amounted to together, with that noble Army of Martyrs who sealed their faith with their blood; of whose sufferings *Ecclesiastick* history gives us such astonishing relations?

II. AND now being compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, the Apostle's inference is very irrefragable, *let us run with patience the race that is set before us*, Heb. 12. 1. But yet it is more so, if we proceed on to that consideration he adjoins, *Looking unto Jesus the Author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endur'd the cross, despising the shame*, ver. 2, 3. Indeed if we contemplate him in the whole course of his life, we shall find him rightly stiled by the prophet, *a man of sorrows*, Isai. 53. And as if he had charged himself with all our grief as well as our sins, there is scarce any human calamity which we may not find exemplified in him. Do's any complain of the lowness and poverty of his condition? Alas, his whole life was a

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state of indigence: he was forced to be an in-mate with the beasts, be laid in a stable at his birth, and after himself professes that he *had not where to lay his head*, Luke 9. 58. Is any oppressed with infamy and reproach? he may see his Saviour accus'd as a *glutton and a wine-bibber*, Luke 7. 34. a *blasphemer*, Joh. 10. 33. a *Sorcerer*, Mat. 12. 24. a *perverter of the nation*, Luk. 23. 2. Yea, to such a sordid lowness had they sunk his repute, that a seditious thief and murderer was thought the more eligible person, *not this man but Barabbas*, John 18. 40. And finally all this scene of indignities, clos'd with the spightful pageantry of *mockery* acted by the souldiers, Mat. 27. 28. and yet the more barbarous insultings of Priests and Scribes, *ver. 41*. Is any man despised or deserted by his friends? he was contemned by his country-men, thought frantick by his friends, betray'd by one of his disciples, abandon'd by all, unless that one who followed him longest, to renounce him the most shamefully by a three-fold abjuration. Nay, what is infinitely more than this, he seem'd deserted by God also, as is witnessed by that doleful exclamation, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Mat. 27. 46. Is any
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dissatisfied with his hardships or labouriousness of his life? let him remember his Saviour's was not a life of delicacy or ease: he was never entred in those Academies of luxury, where men are *gorgeously apparell'd and live delicately*, Luke 7. 25. but he was brought up under the mean roof of a Carpenter, and consequently subjected to all the lowness of such an education. His initiation to his Prophetick office was with the miraculous severity of a fourty days fast, and in his discharge of it, we find him in perpetual labours, *going about doing good*, Acts 10. 38. and that not in triumph, like a Prince bestowing his largesses, but in weary peregrinations, never riding but once, and that only upon a borrow'd beast, *and to fulfill a prophesy*, Mat. 21. Do's any man groan under sharp and acute pains? let him consider what his Redeemer endured, how in his infancy at his circumcision, he offer'd the first-fruits, as an earnest of that bloody vintage, when *he trod the wine press alone*, Isai. 63. 3. Let him attend him thro' all the stages of his direful passion, and behold his arms pinioned with rough cords, his head smote with a reed, and torn with his crown of thorns, his back ploughed

with those *long furrows* (Psalm 129. 3.) the scourges had made; his macerated feeble body oppressed with the weight of his cross, and at last rackt and extended on it; his hands and feet, those nervous and consequently most sensible parts transfixt with nails, his whole body fastned to that accursed tree, and exposed naked to the air in a cold season; his throat parched with thirst, and yet more afflicted with that vinegar and gall wherewith they pretended to relieve him; and finally his life expiring amidst the full sense of the accurate torments. Lastly, do's any man labour under the bitterest of all sorrows, importunate temptations to, or a wounded spirit for sin? even here also he may find that he has an *high Priest who hath been touched with the sense of his infirmities*, Heb. 4. 15. He was violently assaulted with a succession of temptations, *Mat. 4.* and we cannot doubt but Satan would on him employ the utmost of his skill. Nor was he less oppressed with the burden of sin, ours I mean, tho' not his own. What may we think were his apprehensions in the Garden, when he so earnestly deprecated that which was his whole errand into the World? What a dreadful pref-

pressure was that which wrung from him that bloody sweat, and cast him into that inexplicable agony, the horror whereof was beyond the comprehensions of any but his who felt it? And finally how amazing was the sense of divine wrath, which extorted that stupendous complaint, that *strong cry* on the cross, Heb. 5. 7. the sharp accent whereof, if it do a-right sound on our hearts, must certainly quite overwhelm our loudest groans? And now certainly I may say with Pilate, *Esce homo*, behold the man, or rather with a more divine Author, *Behold; if ever there were sorrows like unto his sorrows*, Lam. 1. 12.

12. AND sure it were but a reasonable inference, that which we find made by Christ himself, *if these things be done in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?* Luk. 23. 31. If an imputative guilt could nourish so scorching a flame, pull down so severe a wrath, what can we expect who are meerly made up of combustible matter, whose proper personal sins cry for vengeance? Sure were we to judge by humane measures, we should reckon to have more than a double portion of our Saviour's sufferings entail'd upon us: yet such is the efficacy of his, that they have com-
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muted for ours, and have left us only such a share, as may evidence our relation to our crucified Lord: such as may serve only for badges and cognizances to whom we retain. For alas, let the most afflicted of us weigh our sorrows with his, how absurdly unequal will the comparison appear? And therefore as the best expedient to baffle our mutinies, to shame us out of our repinings, let us often draw this uneven parallel, confront our petty uneasinesses with his unspeakable torments; and sure 'tis impossible but our admiration and gratitude must supplant our impatiencies.

13. THIS is indeed the method to which the Apostle directs us, *Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds: ye have not yet resisted unto blood* Heb. 12. 3, 4. Was he contradicted, and shall we expect to be humor'd and comply'd with? Did he resist to blood, and shall we think those pressures intolerable, which force only a few tears from us? This is such an unmanly niceness, as utterly makes us unfit to follow the Captain of our Salvation. What a souldier is he like to make, that will take no share of the hazards and hardships of his General? Honest Uriah would

would not take the lawful solaces of his own house, upon the consideration that his *Lord Joab* (tho' but his fellow subject) *lay encamped in the open fields*, 2 Sam. 11. 11. yea, tho' he was sent by him from the Camp. And shall we basely forsake ours in pursuit of our ease? He is of a degenerate spirit, whom the example of his superiour will not animate. *Plutarch* tells us, that *Cato* marching thro' the desarts, was so distrest for water, that a small quantity was brought to him in an helmet as a great prize, which he refusing, because he could not help his souldiers to the like, they were so transported with that generosity, that it extinguish'd the sense of their thirst, and they were ashamed to complain of what their Leader voluntarily endur'd for their sakes. And surely we extremely discredit our institution, if we cannot equal their ingenuity, and follow ours with as great alacrity thro' all the difficulties he has traced before us, and for us.

14. NOR let us think to excuse ourselves upon the impotency of our flesh, which wants the assistance which his divinity gave him: for that plea is superseded by the fore-mention'd examples of the Saints, men of like passions with us,
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who not only patiently, but joyfully endure all tribulations; by which it appears, it is not impossible to our nature, with those aids of grace which are common to us with them: for certainly the difference between them and us, is not so much in the degrees of the aids, as in the diligence of employing them. Let us therefore, as the Apostle advises, *lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,* Heb. 12. 12. and with a noble emulation follow those heroick patterns they have set us. And since we see that even those favourites of heaven have smarted so severely, let us never dream of an immunity; but whenever we find our selves inclining to any such flattering hope, let every one of us upbraid our selves in those terms the *Jews* did our Saviour, *Art thou greater than Abraham, and the Prophets, whom makest thou thy self?* Joh. 8. 53. Nay, we may descend lower, and take in not only all the inferiour Saints of former times, but all those our contemporaries in sufferings, which are most within our view, and may ask the Apostle's question, *what then? are we better than they?* Rom. 3. 9. If we think we are, 'tis certain we are so much worse by that insolence; and if we confess we are not, upon what

what score can we pretend to be better treated? To conclude; let us not pore only upon our peculiar evils, but attentively look about us, and consider what others endure: and since in frolicks we can sport our selves with many uneasinesses for company sake, let us not be more pusillanimous in our soberer moods, but every man cheerfully take his turn in bearing the common burden of mortality, till we put off both it and it's apendages together, *when this mortal shall put on immortality*, 1 Cor. 15. 54.

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*Of particular aids for the gaining
of Contentment.*

1. **W**E have now past thro' all those considerations we at first propos'd, and may trust the considering Reader to make his own collections: yet because impatience is the vice that has been all this while arraigned, I am to fore-see if possible, that those who have the greatest degree of that, may be the least willing to attend the whole process; and therefore I think it may not be amiss, for their ease, to suit and reduce all into some short directions and rules for the acquiring contentment.

2. **T**HE first and most fundamental is, the mortifying our pride, which as it is the seminary of most sins, so especially this of repining. Men that are highly opinion'd of themselves, are commonly unsatisfiable: for how well soever they are treated, they still think it short of their merits. Princes have often experimented
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this in those who have done them signal services; but God finds it in those who have done him none, and we expect he shall dispense to us according to those false estimates we put upon our selves. Therefore he that aspires to Content, must first take truer measures of himself, must consider, that as he was nothing till God gave him a being, so all that he can produce from that being, is God's by original right, and therefore can pretend to nothing of reward: so that whatever he receives, is still upon the account of a new bounty; and to complain that he has no more, is like the murmurs of an unthankful debtor, who would still encrease those scores which he knows he can never pay.

3. IN the second place, let every man consider how many blessings (notwithstanding his no claim to any) he daily enjoys: and whether those he so impatiently raves after, be not much inferior to them. Nay, let him ask his own heart, whether he would quit all those he has, for them he wants; and if he would not, (as I suppose no man in his wits would, those wits being part of the barter) let him then judge how unreasonable his repinings are, when himself confesses he has the better part of

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worldly happiness, and never any man living had all.

4. IN the third place therefore let him secure his duty of thankfulness for those good things he hath, and that will insensibly undermine his impatiencies for the rest, it being impossible to be at once thankful and murmuring. To this purpose it were very well, if he would keep a solemn catalogue of all the bounties, protections, and deliverances he has received from God's hand, and every night examine what accessions this day has brought to the sum : and he that did this, would undoubtedly find so many incitations to gratitude, that all those to discontent would be stifled in the croud. And since acknowledgement of God's mercies is all the tribute he exacts for them, we must certainly look on that as an indispensable duty : and therefore he that finds that God shortens his hand, stops the efflux of his bounty towards him, should reflect on himself, whether he be not behind in that homage by which he holds, and have not by his unthankfulness *turn'd away good things from him*, Esa. 59. 8. And if he find it so (as who alas is there that may not?) he cannot sure for
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shame complain, but must in prudence reinforce his gratitude for what is left, as the best means to recover what he has lost.

5. B U T his murmurs will yet be more amazingly silenc'd, if in the fourth place he compares the good things he enjoys with the ill he has done. Certainly this is a most infallible cure for our impatiencies, the holiest man living being able to accuse himself of such sins, as would according to all humane measures of equity forfeit all blessings, and pull down a greater weight of judgement than the most miserable groan under. Therefore as before I advis'd to keep a catalogue of benefits receiv'd, so here it would be of use to draw up one of sins committed. And doubtless he that confronts the one with the other, cannot but be astonish'd to find them both so numerous; equally wondring at God's mercy in continuing his blessings, in despite of all his provocations, and at his own baseness in continuing his provocations, in despite of all those blessings. Indeed, 'tis nothing but our affected ignorance of our own demerits, that makes it possible for us to repine under the severest of God's dispensations. Would
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we but ransack our hearts, and see all the abominations that lie there, nay, would the most of us but recollect those barefac'd crimes which even the world can witness against us, we should find more than enough to balance the heaviest of our pressures. When therefore by our impatient strugglings we fret and gall our selves under our burdens, let us interrogate our souls in the words of the Prophet, *Why doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* Lam. 3. 39. Let us not spend our breath in murmurs and outcries, which will only serve to provoke more stripes: but *let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord*, v. 40. diligently seek out *that accursed thing* which has caused our discomfeiture, *Jos. 7.* and by the removal of that, prepare the way for the access of mercy. But alas, how preposterous a method do we take in our afflictions? We accuse every thing but what we ought; furiously fly at all the second causes of our calamity, nay, too often at the first, by impious disputes of providence; and in the mean time, as *Job* speaks, *the root of the matter is found in us*, Job 19. 28. we shelter and protect in our bosoms the real Author of our miseries.

ries. The true way then to allay the sense of our sufferings, is to sharpen that of our sins. The prodigal thought the meanest condition in his father's family a preferment, *Make me one of thy hired servants*, Luk. 15. 19. And if we have his penitence, we shall have his submission also, and calmly attend God's disposals of us.

6. As every man in his affliction is to look inward, on his own heart, so also upward, and consider by whose providence all events are order'd. *Is there any evil (i. e. of punishment) in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?* Amos 3. 6. and what are we worms that we should dispute with him? Shall a man contend with his Maker? Let the *potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth*, Isa. 45. 9. And as his power is not to be controll'd, so neither is his justice to be impeach'd. *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* Gen. 18. 25. And where we can neither resist nor appeal, what have we to do but humbly to submit? Nor are we only compell'd to it by necessity, but induced and invited by interest; since his dispensations are directed not barely to assert his dominion, but to evidence his paternal care over us. He discerns our needs, and accordingly applies

plies to us. The benignity of his nature permits him not to take delight in our distresses, *he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men*: Lam. 3. 33. and therefore whenever he administers to us a bitter cup, we may be sure the ingredients are medicinal, and such as our infirmities require. He dares not trust our intemperate appetites with unmixt prosperities, the lushiousness whereof, tho' it may please our palats, yet like St. *John's* book, Rev. 10. 9. that *hony in the mouth may prove gall in the bowels*, ingender the most fatal diseases. Let us therefore in our calamities *not consult with flesh and blood*, Gal. 1. 16. (which the more it is bemoan'd, the more it complains) but look to the hand that strikes; and assure our selves, that the stripes are not more severe, than he sees necessary in order to our good: and since they are so, they ought in reason to be our choice as well as his; and not only Religion, but self-love will prompt us to say, with old *Ely*, *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*. 1 Sam. 3. 18. But alas, we do not understand what is our interest; because we do not rightly understand what we are our selves. We consider our selves meerly in our animal

mal being, our bodies and those sensitive faculties vested in them; and when we are invaded there, we think we are undone, tho' that breach be made only to relieve that diviner part within us, besieged and oppressed with the flesh about it (for so God knows it too often is;) or if we do not consider it in that notion of an enemy, yet at the utmost estimate, the body is to the soul but as the garment to the body, a decent case or cover: now what man (not stark frantick) would not rather have his clothes cut than his flesh? and then by the rate of proportion, we may well question our own sobriety, when we repine that our souls are secured at the cost of our bodies, and that is certainly the worst, the unkindest design, that God has upon us; and our impatient resistences serve only to frustrate the kind, and medicinal part of afflictions, but will not at all rescue us from the severe. Our murmurings may ruin our souls, but will never avert any of our outward calamities.

7. A seventh help to contentment is to have a right estimate of the world, and the common state of humanity: to consider the world but as a stage, and our selves but as actors and to resolve that it is very lit-

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tle material what part we play, so we do it well. A Comedian may get as much applause by acting the Slave as the Conqueror; and he that acts the one to day, may to morrow reverse the part, and personate the other. So great are the vicissitudes of the world, that there is no building any firm hopes upon it. All the certainty we have of it, is, that in every condition it has it's uneasinesses: so that when we court a change, we rather seek to vary than end our miseries. And certainly he that has well imprest upon his mind the vanity and vexation of the world, cannot be much surpris'd at any thing that befalls him in it. We expect no more of any thing but to do it's kind: and we may as well be angry that we cannot bring the lions to our cribs, or fix the wind to a certain point, as that we cannot secure our selves from dangers and disappointments in this rough and mutable world. We are therefore to lay it as an infallible maxim, that in this vale of tears, every man must meet with sorrows and disasters: and then sure we may take our peculiar with evenness of temper, as being but the natural consequent of our being men. And tho' possibly we may every one of us think himself to
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have a double portion, yet that is usually from the deceitful comparison we make of our selves with others. We take the magnifying glasses of discontent and envy, when we view our own miseries and others felicities; but look on our enjoyments and their sufferings thro' the contracting opticks of ingratitude and incompassion: and whilst we do thus, 'tis impossible but we must foment our own dissatisfactions. He that will compare to good purpose, must do it honestly and sincerely; and view his neighbours calamities with the same attention he do's his own, and his own comforts with the same he do's his neighbours; and then many of the great seeming inequalities would come pretty near a level.

8. BUT even where they do not, it, in the eighth place, deserves however to be consider'd, how ill natur'd a thing it is for any man to think himself more miserable because another is happy: and yet this is the very thing, by which alone many men have made themselves wretched: for many have created wants, meerly from the envious contemplation of other men's abundance. And indeed there is nothing more disingenuous, or (to go higher) more

Diabolical. *Lucifer* was happy enough in his original state, yet could not think himself so, because he was *not like the most high*, Isa. 14. 14. And when by that insolent ambition he had forfeited bliss, it has ever since been an aggravation of his torment, that mankind is assumed to a capacity of it; and accordingly he makes it the design of his envious industry to defeat him. Now how perfectly are the two first parts of this copy transcrib'd, by those who first cannot be satisfied with any inferior degree of prosperity, and then whet their impatiencies with other men's enjoyments of what they cannot attain? And 'tis much to be doubted, that they who go thus far may compleat the parallel, and endeavour when they have opportunity to undermine that happiness they envy. Therefore since Satan is so apt to impress his whole image, where he has drawn any of his lineaments, it concerns us warily to guard our selves; and by a Christian sympathy with our brethren, *rejoyce with them that do rejoyce*, Rom. 12, 15. make the comforts of others an allay, not an improvement of our own miseries. Charity has a strange magnetick power, and attracts the concerns of our brethren to us, and

and he that has that in his breast can never want refreshment, whilst any about him are happy ; for by adopting their interest, he shares in their joys. *Jethro*, tho' an alien, *rejoyced for all the good God had done to Israel*, *Exod.* 18. 9. and why should not we have as sensible a concurrence with our fellow Christians? And he that has so, will still find something to balance his own sufferings.

9. LET him that aspires to contentment set bounds to his desire. 'Tis our common fault in this affair, we usually begin at the wrong end; *enlarge our desires as hell, and cannot be satisfied*, *Hab.* 2. 5. and then think God uses us ill, if he do not fill our insatiable appetites: whereas if we would confine our expectations to those things which we need, or he has promis'd, there are few of us who would not find them abundantly answer'd. Alas, how few things are there which our nature (if not stimulated by fancy and luxury) requires? And how rare is it to find them who want those? Nay, who have not many additional for delight and pleasure? And yet God's promise under the Gospel extends only to those necessities: for where *Christ* assures his disciples that *these things shall*

shall be added unto them, Mat 6. 33. the context apparently restrains these things to meat and drink and clothing. Therefore take no thought for the life what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor yet for the body what you shall put on, verse 25. Now what pretence have we to claim more than our Charter gives us? God never articted with the ambitious to give him honours, or with the covetous to fill his baggs, or with the voluptuous to feed his luxuries. Let us therefore, if we expect to be satisfied, modestly confine our desires within the limits he has set us: and then every accession which he superadds will appear (what it is) a largess and bounty. But whilst our appetites are boundless, and rather stretcht than fill'd with our acquests, what possibility is there of their satisfaction? And when we importune God for it, we do but assign him such a task as the Poets made a representation of their hell, the filling a sieve with water, or the rolling a stone up a precipice.

10. A great expedient for contentment, is to confine our thoughts to the present, and not let them loose to future events. Would we but do this, we might shake off a great part of our burden:

den: for we often lay fantastick loads upon our selves, by anxious presages of things which perhaps will never happen; and yet sink more under them, than under the real weight that is actually upon us. And this is certainly one of the greatest follies imaginable: for, either the evil will come or it will not: if it will, 'tis sure no such desirèable guest that we should go out to meet it; we shall feel it time enough when it falls on us, we need not project to anticipate our sense of it: but if it will not, what extreme madness is it for a man to torment himself with that which will never be; to create engines of tortures, and by such aerial afflictions, make himself as miserable as the most real ones could do? And truly this is all that we usually get by our fore-sights. Prevision is one of God's attributes, and he mocks at all our pretences to it, by a frequent defeating of all our fore-casts. He do's it often in our hopes, some little cross circumstance many times demolishes those goodly machins we raise to our selves. And he do's it no less in our fears: those ills we solemnly expected often baulk us, and others from an unexpected coast suddenly invade us. And since we are so blind, so short-sighted, let

let us never take upon us to be scouts, to discover danger at a distance (for 'tis manifold odds we shall only bring home false alarms;) but let us rest our selves upon that most admirable Aphorism of our blessed Lord, *Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*, Mat. 6. 34. apply our selves with Christian courage to bear the present, and leave God either to augment or diminish, as he sees fit, for the future. Or if we will needs be looking forward, let it be in obedience, not contradiction, to our duty; let us entertain our selves with those futurities which we are sure are no Chimeras, death, and judgment, heaven, and hell. The nearer we draw these things to our view, the more insensible will all intermedial objects be; they will deceive our sense of present, and much more fore-stall the apprehension of future evils: for 'tis our neglect of things eternal, that leaves us thus at leisure for the transitory.

II. IN the last place let us in all our distresses supersede our anxieties and solitudes, by that most effectual remedy the Apostle prescribes, *Is any man afflicted? let him pray*. Jam. 5. 13. And this sure is a most rational prescription: for alas, what else can we do towards the redress
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of our griefs? We who are so impotent, that we have not power over the most despicable excrescence of our own body, cannot make *one hair white or black*, Mat. 5. 36. what can we do towards the new moulding our condition, or modelling things without us? Our sollicitudes serve only to bind our burdens fatter upon us, but this expedient of prayer will certainly relieve us: *Call upon me*, says God, *in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt praise me*, Psal. 50. 15. Whenever therefore we are sinking in the floods of affliction, let us thus support ourselves by representing our wants unto our gracious Lord; cry unto him, as St. Peter did, Mat. 14. 30. and he will *take us by the hand, and be the winds never so boisterous or contrary*, preserve us from sinking: the waves or billows of this troublesome world, will serve but to toss us closer into his arms, who can with a word appease the roughest tempest, or rescue from it. O let us not then be so unkind to our selves, as to neglect this infallible means of our deliverance! but with the Psalmist, take our refuge under the *shadow of the divine wings, till the calamity be over-past*, Psalm 57. 1. And as this is a sure expedient in

all our real important afflictions, so is it a good test by which to try what are so. We are often peevish and disquieted at trifles, nay, we take up the quarrels of our lusts and vices, and are discontented when they want their wisht supplies. Now in either of these cases, no man that at all considers who he prays to, will dare to insert these in his prayers; it being a contempt of God to invoke him in things so slight as the one, or impious as the other. It will therefore be good for every man when he goes to address for relief, to consider what of his pressures they are, that are worthy of that solemn deprecation: and when he has singled those out, let him reflect, and he will find he has in that, prejudg'd all his other discontents as frivolous or wicked. And then sure he cannot think fit to harbour them, but must for shame dismiss them, since they are such, as he dare not avow to him, from whom alone he can expect relief. God always pities our real miseries, but our imaginary ones dare not demand it. Let us not then create such diseases to our selves, as we cannot declare to our Physician: and when those are precluded, for all the rest St.

Paul's receipt is a Catholicon: Be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayers and supplications, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.
Philip. 4. 6.

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SECT.

SECT. XI.

Of Resignation.

1. **A**ND now amidst such variety of receipts, 'twill be hard to instance any one sort of calamity which can escape their efficacy, if they be but duly apply'd. But indeed we have generally a compendious way of frustrating all remedies by never making use of them: like fantastick patients, we are well enough content to have our disease discourst, and medicines prescrib'd, but when the Physick comes, have still some pretence or other to protract the taking it, But I shall beseech the Reader to consider, that counsels are not charms, to work without any cooperation of the concern'd person: they must be adverted to, they must be ponder'd and consider'd, and finally they must be practis'd, or else the utmost good they can do us, is to give us a few hours divertisement in the reading: but they do us a mischief that infinitely out-weighs it, for they improve

prove our guilts by the ineffective tender they make of rescuing us from them, and leave us accountable not only for the original crimes, but for our obstinate adhesion to them in spite of admonition.

2. I say this, because it is a little too notorious, that many take up books only as they do cards or dice, as an instrument of diversion. 'Tis a good entertainment of their curiosity to see what can be said upon any subject, and be it well or ill handled, they can please themselves equally with the ingenuity or ridiculousness of the Composure, and when they have done this, they have done all they design'd. This indeed may be tolerable in Romances and Play-books, but sure it ill befits Divinity. And yet I fear it oftneft happens there: for in the former some do project for some trivial improvements, as the embellishing of their style, the inspiring of their fancies; and some men would scarce be able to drive their pedling trade of it, did they not thus sweep the stage: but alas, how many books of piety are read, of which one cannot discern the least tincture in men's conversations! which sure do's in a great measure proceed from the want of a determinate design in
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their reading; men's practice being not apt to be less rovers than their speculation. He that takes a practical subject in hand, must do it with a design to conform his practice to what he shall there be convinc'd to be his duty: and he that comes not with this probity of mind, is not like to be much benefited by his reading.

3. BUT one would think this should be an unnecessary caution at this time: for since the intent of this tract, is only to shew men the way to contentment, 'tis to be suppos'd the Readers will be as much in earnest as the writer can be; it being every man's proper and most important interest, the instating him in the highest and most supreme felicity that this world can admit. Yet for all this fair probability, I doubt many will in this instance have the same indifference they have in their other spiritual concerns.

4. 'Tis true indeed that a querulous repining humor, is one of the most pernicious, the most ugly habits incident to mankind: but yet as deformed people are oft the most in love with themselves, so this crooked piece of our temper is of all others the most indulgent to it self. Melancholy

lancholy is the most stubborn and untractable of all humors; and discontent being the offspring of that, partakes of that inflexibility: and accordingly we see how impregnable it often is, against all assaults of reason and religion too. *Jonah* in a sullen mood would justify his discontent even to God himself, and in spite of that calm reproof, *dost thou well to be angry?* *Jon. 4. 9. ever he did well to be angry even to the death.* And do we not frequently see men upon an impatience of some disappointment, grow angry even at their comforts? Their friends, their children, their meat, their drink, every thing grows nauseous to them, and in a frantick discontent, they often fling away those things which they most value. Besides, this peevish impatience is of so aerial a diet, that 'tis scarce possible to starve it. 'Twill nourish it self with Phantasms and Chimera's; suborn a thousand surmises and imaginary distresses to abett it's pretences: and tho' every one of us can remonstrate to another, the unreasonableness of this discontent; yet scarce any of us will draw the argument home, or suffer our selves to be convinc'd by what we urge as irrefragable to others. Nay farther, this humor is impatient of
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any diversion, loves to converse only with it self. In bodily pains, men that despair of cure, are yet glad of allays and mitigations, and strive by all arts, to divert and deceive the sense of their anguish; but in this disease of the mind, men cherish and improve their torment, roll and chew the bitter pill in their mouthes, that they may be sure to have it's utmost flavor; and by devoting all their thoughts to the subject of their grief, keep up an uninterrupted sense of it: as if they had the same Tyranny for themselves which *Caligula* had for others, and loved to feel themselves die. Indeed, there is not a more absurd contradiction in the world, than to hear men cry out of the weight, the intolerableness of their burden, and yet grasp it as fast as if their life were bound up in it; will not deposite it, no not for the smallest breathing time. A strange fascination sure, and yet so frequent, that it ought to be the fundamental care of him that would cure men of their discontents, to bring them to a hearty willingness of being cured.

5. IT may be this will look like paradox, and every man will be apt to say he wishes nothing more in earnest, than to be
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be cured of his present discontent. He that is poor would be cured by wealth, he that is low and obscure by honour and greatness: but so an hydropick person may say he desires to have his thirst cured by a perpetual supply of drink: yet all sober people know, that that is the way only to increase it: but let the whole habit of the body be rectified, and then the thirst will cease of it self. And certainly 'tis the very same in the present case: no outward accessions will ever satisfy our cravings. Our appetites must be tam'd and reduc'd, and then they will never be able to raise tumults, or put us into mutiny and discontent. And he (and none but he) that submits to this method, can truly be said to desire a cure.

6. BUT he that thus attests the reality of his desires, and seeks contentment in it's proper sphere, may surely arrive to some considerable degrees of it. We find in all ages, men, that only by the direction of natural light, have calm'd their disquiets, and reason'd themselves into contentment, even under great and sensible pressures: men, who amidst the acutest torments, have still preserv'd a serenity of mind; and have frustrated con-

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tempt;

tempts and reproaches by disregarding them: and sure we give a very ill account of our Christianity, if we cannot do as much with it, as they did without it.

7. I do not here propose such a Stoical insensibility as makes no distinction of events, which, tho' it has been vainly pretended to by many, yet sure was never attain'd by any upon the strength of discourse. Some natural dulness or casual stupefaction must concur to that, and perhaps by doing so, has had the luck to be canoniz'd for vertue. I mean only such a superiority of mind, as raises us above our sufferings, tho' it exempt us not from the sense of them. We cannot propose to our selves a higher pattern in any vertue than our blessed Lord; yet we see he not only felt that load under which he lay, but had the most pungent and quick sense of it, such as prompted those earnest deprecations, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass*; yet all those displacencies of his flesh were surmounted by the resignation of his spirit, *nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt*, Luke 22. And certainly he that in imitation of this pattern, do's in spight of all the reluctancies of his sense, thus entirely submit his will,
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however he may be sad, yet he is not impatient; nor is he like to be sad long, for to him that is thus *resign'd*, *light will spring up*; Psal. 97. 11. some good Angel will be sent like that to our Saviour to relieve his disconsolation. God will send either some outward allaiies, or give such interiour comforts and supports, as shall counterpoise those afflictions he takes not off.

8. INDEED the grand design of God in correcting us, is (the same with that of a prudent parent towards his child) to break our wills. That stubborn faculty will scarce bend with easie touches, and therefore do's require some force: and when by that rougher handling, he has brought it to a pliantness, the work is done. Tis therefore our interest to cooperate with this design; to assist as much as we are able towards the subjugating this unruly part of our selves. This is that *Sheba*, 2 Sam. 20. the surrendring of whom is God's expectation in all the close sieges he lays to us. Let us then be so wise, as by an early resigning it to divert his farther hostilities, and buy our peace with him.

9. AND truly this is the way, not only to gain peace with him, but our selves

too: 'tis the usurpation of our will over our reason, which breeds all the confusion and tumults within our own breasts, and there is no possibility of curbing it's insolence, but by putting it into safe custody, committing it to him, who (as our Church teaches us) *alone can order the unruly wills of sinful men.* Indeed, nothing but experience can fully inform us of the serenity and calm of that soul, who has resign'd his will to God. All care of choosing for himself is happily superseded, he is tempted to no anxious forecasts for future events, for he knows nothing can happen in contradiction of that supreme will, in which he hath sanctuary: which will certainly choose for him with that tenderness and regard, that a faithful Guardian would for his Pupil, an indulgent Father for his child that casts it's self into his arms. Certainly there is not in the world such an holy sort of artifice, so divine a charm to tie our God to us, as this of *resigning* our selves to him. We find the *Gibeonites* by yielding themselves vassals to the *Israelites*, had their whole army at their beck to rescue them in their danger, *Josh. 10. 6.* and can we think God is less considerate of his homagers and dependents?

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No certainly: his honour as well as his compassion is concern'd in the relief of those who have surrendred themselves to him.

10. FARTHER yet, when by *resignation* we have united our wills to God, we have quite changed the scene, and we who, when our wills stood single, were lyable to perpetual defeats, in this blessed combination can never be crost. When our will is twisted and involved with God's, the same Omnipotence which backs his will, do's also attend ours. God's will, we are sure, admits of no controul, can never be resisted; and we have the same security for ours, so long as it concurs with it. By this means all calamities are unsting'd, and even those things which are most repugnant to our sensitive natures, are yet very agreeable to our spirits, when we consider they are implicately our own choice, since they are certainly his, whom we have deputed to elect for us. Indeed there can be no face of adversity so averting and formidable, which set in this light will not look amiable. We see daily how many uneasinesses and prejudices men will contentedly suffer in pursuit of their wills: and if we have really espoused God's, made his will ours, we shall
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with as great (nay far greater) alacrity embrace it's distributions, how uneasy soever to our sense; our souls will more acquiesce in the accomplishment of the Divine will, than our flesh can reluct to any severe effects of it.

II. HERE then is that footing of firm ground, on which whosoever can stand, may indeed do that which *Archimedes* boasted, move the whole world. He may as to himself subvert the whole course of sublunary things, unvenom all those calamities which are to others the gall of Asps; and in a farther sense verify that Evangelical prophesy, of *beating swords into plough-shares, and spears into pruning hooks*: *Isai. 2. 4.* The most hostile weapons, the most adverse events, shall be by him converted into instruments of fertility, shall only advance his spiritual growth.

12. AND now who can choose but confess this a much more eligible state, than to be always harrassed with sollicitudes and cares, perpetually either fearing future defeats, or bewailing the past? And then what can we call it less than madness or enchantment, for men to act so contrary to their own dictates, yea, to
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their very sense and experience; to see and acknowledge the inexplicable felicity of a resign'd will, and yet perversly to hold out theirs, tho' they can get nothing by it, but the sullen pleasure of opposing God, and tormenting themselves? Let us therefore, if not for our duty and ease, yet at least for our reputation, the asserting our selves men of sobriety and common sense, do that which upon all these interests we are obliged; let us but give up our wills, and with them we shall certainly divest our selves of all our fruitless anxieties, and cast our burdens upon him who invites us to do so. He who bears all our sins, will bear all our sorrows, our griefs too: if we will be but content to deposite them, he will relieve us from all those oppressing weights, which make *our souls cleave to the dust*, Psalm 119. 25. and will in exchange give us only his *light*, *his pleasant burden*, Matt. 11. 30. In a word, there will be no care left for us, but that of keeping our selves in a capacity of his: let us but secure our love to him, and we are ascertain'd that *all things shall work together for our good*, Rom. 8. 28.

To conclude, *Resignation* and *Contentment* are virtues, not only of a near
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cognition and resemblance, but they are linked as the Cause and the Effect. Let us but make sure of *Resignation*, and Content will flow in to us without our farther industry; as on the contrary, whilst our wills are at defiance with God's, we shall always find things at as great defiance with ours. All our subtilities or industries will never mould them to our satisfactions, till we have moulded our selves into that plyant temper that we can cordially say, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*, 1 Sam. 3. 18.

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The Close.

1. **T**HIS short institution of the *Art of Contentment*, cannot more naturally, or more desirably draw to a conclusion, than in the resort we have given it, in the bosom of divine *Providence*. The *Roman* Conquerors as the last pitch of all their triumphs, went to the Capitol, and laid their Garlands in the lap of *Jupiter*: but the Christian has an easier way to Triumph, to put his Crown of thorns (for that is the Trophy of his victories) within the arms of his gracious God; there lodge his fears, his wants, his sorrows, and himself too, as in the best repository.

2. **T**HE Gospel command of *not caring for the morrow*, Matt. 6. 34. and being *careful for nothing*, Philip. 4. 6. nakedly propos'd, might seem the abandoning of us to all the calamities of life: but when we are directed to *cast all our care* upon a gracious and all-powerful Parent, and are assured that *he cares for us*, 1 Pet. 5. 7. That *tho' a woman may forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion*

of the son of her womb, yet will he not forget his children, Isaiah 49. 15, this will abundantly supersede all cavil and objection. Whilst worldly men trust in an arm of flesh, lay up *treasure on earth*, a prey for *rust and moth*, Matt. 6. 19. and *a torment* to themselves, Jam. 5. 3. the Christian has Omnipotence for his support, and *a treasure in heaven*, where no thief approaches, nor moth corrupts, Matt. 6. 20. Whilst bold inquirers call in question God's secret will, oblige him to their *sub* or *supralapsarian* schemes, their *absolute* or *conditional* decrees, their *grace foreseen* or *predetermin'd*; the pious man with awful acquiescence submits to that which is reveal'd: resolves for ever to obey, but never to dispute; as knowing that the belov'd disciple lean'd on his Master's bosom; but 'tis the thief's and traitor's part to go about to rifle it.

3. 'Tis surely a modest demand in the behalf of God Almighty, that we should allow him as much privilege in his world, as every Peasant claims in his cottage; to be master there, and dispose of his household as he thinks best: to *say to this man, Go, and he goeth: and to another, Come, and he cometh: and to his servant, Do this,*

and he doth it, Matt. 8. 9. And if we would afford him this liberty, there would be an immediate end put to all clamor and complaint.

4. WE make it our daily prayer that *the will of God may be done in earth as it is in heaven*, with a ready, swift, and uninterrupted constancy. As 'tis Giant-like rebellion to set up our will against his, so is it mad perverseness to set it up against our own; be displeas'd that our requests are granted, and repine that his, and therewith our will is done. It were indeed not only good manners, but good policy, to observe the direction of the Heathen, and *follow God*, not prejudice his determination by ours; but in a modest suspension of our thoughts, *Hearken what the Lord God will say concerning us, for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his Saints that they turn not again*, Psal. 85. 8.

5. OR however upon surprise we may indulge to a passionate affection, and dote upon our illegitimate off-spring, our darling guilts or follies, as *David* did upon that Child, who was the price of Murder and Adultery: yet when the brat is taken from us, when the *Child is dead*, it will

become us to do as he did, rise from our fullen posture on the earth, and *worship in the house of the Lord*, 2 Sam. 12. 20. It will behove us, as he says in another place, to *lay our hand upon our mouth, because it was his doing*, Psalm 39. 10. and with holy *Job*, Chap. 40. 4, 5. when charg'd with his murmurings, *Behold I am vile, what shall I answer? Once have I spoken, but I will not answer: yea twice, but I will proceed no farther.*

6. *Socrates* rightly said of Contentment, opposing it to the riches of fortune and opinion, that 'tis the wealth of nature: for it gives every thing that we have learnt to want, and really need: but Resignation is the riches of Grace, bestowing all things that a Christian not only needs, but can desire, even Almighty God himself. He indeed, as the Schoolmen teach, is the objective happiness of the Creature; He who is the fountain of being, must be also of blessedness: and tho' this be only communicable to us, when we have put off that *flesh which cannot enter into the kingdom of God*, and laid aside that *corruption which cannot inherit incorruption*, 1 Cor. 15. yet even in this life, we may make approaches to that blessed

fed state, by acts of Resignation and denial of our selves. It was the generous saying of *Socrates*, being about to die, unto his friends; O *Crito*, since it is the will of God, so let it be: *Anytus* and *Melitus* may kill me, but cannot hurt me. But such a resignation, as 'tis infinitely a greater duty to a Christian, so it is also a more firm security. In that case 'tis not the *Martyr*, but *Jesus* of *Nazareth* who is thus persecuted, and he who attacks him will find it hard to kick against the pricks, Acts 9. 5.

7. THERE could not be a greater instance of the profligate sensuality of the *Israelites*, than that they murmured for want of *leeks and onions*, Numbers 11. 5. when they eat Angels food, and had bread rain'd down from heaven. 'Tis impossible for the soul that is sensible of God Almighty's favour, to repine at any earthly pressure. *The Lord is my shepherd*, saith *David*, therefore can I lack nothing, Psal. 23. 1. And, thou hast put gladness into my heart, more than when their corn, and wine, and oil increased, Psa. 4. 7. and in passionate rapture he cries out, Psalm 73. 25. *Whom have I heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee.*

thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. And likewise Ps. 46. 1. &c. God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, tho' the earth be moved: and tho' the hills be carried into the midst of the sea. Tho' the waters thereof rage and swell, and tho' the mountains shake at the tempest of the same. If God be in the midst of us we shall not be removed, he will help us, and that right early. Let us therefore possess our selves of this support, and, as the Prophet advises, Isa. 8. 12. neither fear nor be afraid, in any exigence how great soever; but be still and quiet, and sanctifie the Lord of Hosts himself, and let him be our fear, and let him be our dread.



FINIS.

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